Snapshots of EAP Research Journeys

edited by Lia Blaj-Ward & Sarah Brewer

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Introduction

Lia Blaj-Ward & Sarah Brewer

Background

English for Academic Purposes (EAP), similar to the academic disciplines with which it is interlinked, relies on research to develop its knowledge base and reassess its relevance to learners, to the academic communities it interacts with and to the institutional structures within which it sits. A considerable body of research focuses on issues related to the academic experience of international students, which are explored from within a range of disciplinary traditions – from Applied Linguistics and Education to Business, Sociology and Geography. Insights from research have informed both day-to-day and higher level strategy decisions made by and for EAP professionals, and, in its turn, EAP practice has generated research questions and has offered a context in which research findings could be applied and critically evaluated. There can be a tension between research and practice in EAP, as the institutional structures within which EAP is embedded do not frequently allocate resources to EAP professionals to participate in research activity. However, this tension can be productive, as, in many cases, EAP practitioners have drawn on their personal professional resourcefulness and embarked on research projects, driven by their commitment to enriching the learning lives of higher education students opting to study in English outside (or sometimes within) their country of origin.

Snapshots of EAP Research Journeys is not a collection of research reports, it is a collection of narratives of personal resourcefulness. Each contributor, either a presenter or a non-presenting participant at one of BALEAP's research training (ResTES) events, has shared a personal reflection on a research project in which they have been involved.[1] Potential contributors to *Snapshots* were invited to submit a reflective narrative about their experience of conducting a piece of EAP research, accompanied by one of the following: a reference to a formal account of an aspect of the research on which they reflect in the narrative; a link to a piece of research they have already published (in print or electronic form); or the abstract, slides or link to a video recording of a conference or seminar presentation they delivered based on their research. *Snapshots* captures the journey hidden behind formal, structured accounts of EAP research for the benefit of a wider audience of EAP professionals who are considering embarking on a research journey.

The definition of research which underpinned ResTES was as follows: 'systematic and rigorous gathering and interpretation of evidence to inform teaching and learning practice, policy, and/or further research into the EAP field' (Blaj-Ward, 2010). The profiles of participants and presenters that ResTES was designed to bring together in order to contribute to building research capacity within EAP ranged across a number of categories:

> EAP professionals needing to generate evidence for a key decision about EAP provision in their institution; already established EAP researchers with a publications profile; EAP practitioners keen to explore an aspect of their teaching practice; EAP tutors who would like to know more about how discipline academics cater for international students in their teaching; MA students looking forward to starting

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[1] See BALEAP, 2011, pp. 206-207. for a description of ResTES. A discussion of the pedagogic principles behind ResTES is available in Blaj-Ward (forthcoming).

dissertation work on an EAP-related topic; EAP professionals willing to share their completed MA research with a wider audience but not sure where to start; or doctoral researchers with an interest in EAP.
(BALEAP, 2011, p. 207)

Snapshots contributors' accounts are written from a number of different viewpoints and aptly reflect this variety.

Inspiration for *Snapshots* came from several sources. One of these was a volume published by the Institute of Education, University of London (Carnell, MacDonald, McCallum and Scott, 2008). Another was a resource produced for the Higher Education Academy's ESCalate Subject Centre for Education (Brown, 2009). Carnell et al.'s *Passion and Politics* is a collection of transcripts of interviews with 'much published academics' (p. 57) in Education and the Social Sciences about their experience of writing for publication, preceded by an interpretive analysis of the transcripts. Brown (2009) focuses on the doctoral student experience and the accounts collected are written by academics who reflect on their EdD/PhD journeys. Both sources offer invaluable insights into what it means to become a 'legitimate' member of an academic community and a published author. Yet, while they may resonate with some members of the BALEAP community, the journeys they describe may be less readily applicable to EAP professionals whose interest in research is driven by a desire to have an immediate impact in the contexts in which they teach. The ESCalate Subject Centre also supported the development of a collection of narratives of perhaps more specific relevance to EAP professionals, namely, *The Doctorate: International stories of the UK experience* (Trahar, 2011), the sequel to Brown (2009). We included this in our original email when we invited contributions to *Snapshots*, both as an example for the snapshots and, indirectly, as a way of publicising the ESCalate resource to professionals supporting international doctoral students.

The examples in Trahar's (2011) collection helped us offer potential contributors to *Snapshots* a point of comparison, but were just a starting point. *Snapshots* is different in that, rather than focusing on the experience of studying for a formal research degree, the narratives capture a wider range of research journeys. When reading Trahar (2011) it was noticeable that contributors to that collection had studied for their doctorates at research-intensive universities (Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, University of London's Insitute of Education, Nottingham), where presumably the attention paid to training researchers in these institutions means that a more complex support network would potentially have been available to them. *Snapshots*, we hope, offers EAP practitioners examples they can more readily relate to in their own professional contexts, where support may not be easily forthcoming and research cultures are perhaps not as fully developed.

Editorial choices

We chose the label 'snapshots' because we felt this adequately captured specific meaningful moments in our contributors' experience of conducting research; the snapshots in this collection are illustrations of how contributors grappled with the tensions around research and how they found a way forward. The snapshots have been made available to a wider audience as a source of inspiration and hopefully a catalyst or springboard for new research projects. One question we explored in the incipient stages of ResTES was how we could measure and evaluate the impact of the series. As the series progressed we became increasingly aware that our focus should not be on

the series itself but on participants and presenters, as they are the ones who enrich the EAP field through their research and practice. We set aside concerns with measuring impact and started thinking about ways of showcasing and celebrating work by ResTES presenters and participants. Following the example of the ESCalate resources we chose narratives as a format rather than semi-structured interviews (as in Carnell et al., 2008), because we wanted to give contributors as much control as possible over their stories; while we did annotate first drafts with comments and questions, we emphasized to contributors that they were not required to make any changes which would divert the narrative in a direction with which they are not comfortable.

The first nine snapshots are organised in alphabetical order according to author surname. Four snapshot authors presented at ResTES events; the authors of the other five contributions were ResTES participants. The closing snapshot has an indirect link to ResTES; its author, Sara Hannam, is a member of the BALEAP Research and Publications Subcommittee, and her work on the subcommittee involves support targeted specifically at one of the categories of researchers supported through ResTES, namely doctoral students. Each of the ten snapshots is meant to be read in conjunction with the more formal account of research referenced under the snapshot title.

Brief overview of snapshots

In the first contribution to this resource, Olwyn Alexander writes about how piloting an EAP textbook led to identifying an issue worth exploring in more depth; the findings from the research she conducted she then processed and integrated into a formal account and made available to a wider audience through an article which has appeared in the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. Olwyn highlights how important it is for EAP practitioners to have experience of conducting research in order to be able to support postgraduate students effectively.

Siân Alsop's snapshot focuses on 'gaining a sense of control over the data' (p. 16). As a PhD student attached to a team research project involving corpus analysis of recorded academic lectures in English, she played an important part in identifying effective procedures for data processing and analysis. The corpus will eventually be openly accessible to researchers and teachers as a searchable resource.

Helen Bowstead's account centres on narrative educational research and problematises research relationships in the context of an increasingly internationalised UK higher education system. Through her use of narrative excerpts about Pary (not her real name), an international PhD student, and through reflective commentary on her own role as a researcher, Helen illustrates the ethical and intellectual complexity of research encounters and highlights the value of exploring personal stories to understand the impact of the HE internationalisation agenda on everyday academic lives.

The authors of the fourth snapshot, Caroline Burns (an EAP lecturer) and Martin Foo (an Accounting lecturer), narrate and reflectively contextualise the story of an action research project which informed in-sessional EAP provision for international students at Newcastle Business School. The research outcomes, linked to the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, helped raise the profile of the collaborative work that Caroline and Martin are engaged in and therefore 'support has been more forthcoming' (p. 27).

Christopher Macallister writes about becoming an EAP ethnographer and preparing to explore how pre-sessional tutors experienced the implementation of an in-house, highly bespoke

curriculum at the University of Durham. Reading for an MA in Applied Linguistics supported his transition from library-based research to qualitative fieldwork.

The focus of Nathaniel Owen's snapshot is research into high-stakes test validation. The snapshot emphasizes that validation is a 'multidisciplinary concern which requires multiple voices to construct a convincing validation argument' (pp. 36-37). Nathaniel completed an MA dissertation and is currently developing insights from his dissertation into a PhD project. A key theme in Nathaniel's research journey is sharing insights and findings with EAP practitioners within the immediate context in which his research was conducted as well as engaging the wider professional community (both EAP practitioners and other stakeholders) in critical reflection on claims associated with in-house pre-sessional exit tests.

Writing from outside the UK educational context, Larysa Sanotska discusses how attending two research training events enabled her to develop her understanding of qualitative research methodology, which she then applied to the design and evaluation of an academic writing course. Larysa's snapshot usefully reminds the reader that teachers engaging in classroom-based research have access to a wide range of qualitative data sources and that acknowledging one's own pedagogic beliefs at the outset of research and thoroughly and systematically sifting through the data helps ground course design choices firmly in the reality of the classroom to adequately support students' needs. Larysa's data gave her confidence that making extensive use of activities which involved collaborative learning and integrating creative writing techniques into her academic writing course helped her create a suitable learning environment for her students.

At the time of writing his snapshot, Bill Soden was a few weeks away from submitting his PhD thesis. Bill 'look[s] beyond the frustrations of working full-time and carrying out part-time research' (p. 43) into feedback on written work, to reflect on the process of engaging with published literature and of writing draft thesis sections. He discusses how his research was sustained by and fed into his work as an EAP practitioner and echoes Olwyn Alexander's message about being able to relate on a deeper level and respond more effectively to the writing support needs of EAP students.

The ninth snapshot (written by Chitra Varaprasad) highlights key moments and achievements throughout a twenty-four-year journey as an EAP practitioner and researcher. Chitra emphasizes how research enhanced her teaching practice and how her practice offered material for ongoing reflection and research. A prolific writer and conference presenter, as can be seen in the References to her snapshot, Chitra ends with the following comment: 'My reflective journey continues...' (p. 50).

In the closing section, Sara Hannam writes about her use of Survey Monkey to gather data in preparation for setting up an EAP doctoral research network within BALEAP. Sara's ongoing research will inform decisions about areas of support to be prioritised in order to offer current EAP doctoral students additional support towards completion. It will also underpin initiatives to encourage more EAP practitioners to undertake doctoral research and to offer development opportunities to both potential and experienced EAP research supervisors.

EAP research(er) journeys: common themes and future developments

A key theme which recurs across the snapshots is the strong link between research and practice: research interests develop out of classroom teaching practice or have projected outcomes designed to make a difference in a teaching practice or professional development context. *Snapshots* authors emphasize that the experience of undertaking research gave them greater

understanding of how to support students effectively, especially at postgraduate level. They explain how they engaged stakeholders (e.g., students, teaching colleagues, other higher education professionals) in the research process and argue in favour of research underpinning decisions made both in local, immediate contexts and on a sector-wide scale. The authors also acknowledge and reflect on the (productive) tensions between the various roles they brought to practice-oriented research (e.g., teacher, researcher, teacher trainer, materials developer, manager).

In terms of learning about research, the authors of the snapshots mention attending research training events and conferences and receiving support from colleagues. They also reference research methodology texts which inspired them and helped shape their understanding of the research process. They underline the value that being directly engaged in research, exploring and reflecting on methodological choices have for someone who is aiming to develop their research skills and knowledge. They actively seek out opportunities to develop as researchers. In a 2005 interview with Ken Hyland for *ELT Journal*, Jo McDonough asked where 'the research base in EAP is actually coming from' and whether the 'people with heavy teaching loads [...] are in a sense being what Freeman (2000) called "walled out" from where the research is' (p. 59). *Snapshots* authors' accounts can be read as an answer to McDonough's questions; they describe contributions to the EAP research base and exemplify individual strategies for creating spaces in which valuable knowledge for the EAP profession is co-constructed.

Lastly, and very importantly, all snapshots look to the future. While individual projects have timelines and endpoints, all support Chitra's comment that the 'reflection journey continues...'; new research interests emerge out of existing projects; insights generated have an impact beyond the life of a particular piece of research. Contact details for the authors are provided, so that readers who find in *Snapshots* something that resonates with their own experience can get in touch with the authors and become part of a wider EAP research network.

Editor details

Lia Blaj-Ward (Nottingham Trent University, UK) and Sarah Brewer (University of Reading, UK) coordinated the research training events to which *Snapshots* is linked. Currently members of the BALEAP Executive Committee and of the BALEAP Research and Publications Subcommittee, they provide input into and are engaged in the operationalisation of BALEAP's strategy to build research capacity within the EAP field. They share an interest in researcher development, in part prompted by their own experience of undertaking doctoral study some years ago, and a commitment to supporting the academic success of international students in UK higher education through their day-to-day teaching and related activities.

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Uncovering teacher beliefs in EAP

Olwyn Alexander

I work at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh with students who are studying or preparing to study degrees in applied disciplines such as science, engineering, business management and translation. An important aspect of my professional development as an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teacher has been reading about research developments in applied linguistics and education more generally. This has helped me to better understand the learning processes that occur in my classrooms and to apply new insights from research to materials development. My particular interests include discourse analysis, syllabus design and, more recently, how EAP syllabuses might be framed around graduate attributes. Together with two colleagues, Sue Argent and Jenifer Spencer, I distilled my understanding of research in EAP in a handbook for EAP teachers (Alexander et al., 2008). Sue Argent and I wanted to demonstrate how the principles in Alexander et al. (2008) might work in practice so we have also published two coursebooks. *Access EAP: Foundations* is for students at a low level of language proficiency, around B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR);[2] *Access EAP: Frameworks* takes students on to university entrance level or C2 on CEFR. During the piloting of *Access EAP: Foundations*, I conducted a small-scale study of teacher beliefs about teaching EAP to students with low proficiency levels (Alexander, 2012). I aimed to explore what appears to be a widely-held belief among teachers that EAP cannot be taught until learners have mastered a basic foundation of core grammatical structures. *Access EAP: Foundations* challenges this belief so the research project and the subsequent article provided an opportunity to collect evidence to support that challenge. In this snapshot, I am going to reflect on the research process of gathering data and writing the article for publication and on the tensions between my roles as colleague, teacher trainer, coursebook writer and researcher.

I became interested in understanding teacher beliefs about differences between Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and teaching EAP as a result of discussions with teachers on a short EAP professional development course I and my colleagues delivered at Heriot-Watt University between 2002 and 2009. At that time, there was little formal training available, at least in the UK, to support CLT teachers in changing to teach EAP. Reflective

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[2] CEFR available online at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_en.pdf.

teachers, who became aware of the different approach required for the EAP context, reported that their first experience of teaching EAP left them feeling 'deskilled' because they had lost their sense of expertise along with their confidence, and effectively reverted to the status of pre-service teachers in relation to EAP teaching. Some teachers were reluctant to acknowledge that they needed to reorient their teaching approach away from developing oral proficiency in conversational interactions and towards the processes of understanding and producing academic texts. As a teacher trainer, I viewed this reluctance as a defensive response from teachers who were not prepared to undertake the challenge of reorienting their approach. This defensiveness, I believe, can create barriers to effective teaching and efficient learning in what is a high stakes enterprise for the students involved. Thus, my own strong stance as a teacher trainer about teachers' beliefs was in tension with the need to adopt an enquiring stance as a researcher in order to investigate as objectively as possible which beliefs might constitute barriers or success factors for teaching EAP.

Another area of tension between my roles as EAP teacher, teacher trainer and researcher concerned the relationship between the collection of data and the review of relevant literature. The purpose of a literature review is to frame a study so that it will fit into an ongoing intellectual conversation (Luker, 2008). Most PhD projects start with a year or more spent gathering together and reviewing appropriate literature to provide a rationale for the study, specify a research question and justify the choice of research methodology. This is the aspect I find most daunting about doing research because my teaching and other commitments rarely allow me time for extended reading and reflection. However, this project began not with a literature review but during the piloting of *Access EAP: Foundations*. I had already interviewed the two teachers who piloted the book before I realised that I had interesting data and understood how I might frame the study. The two pilot teachers, sharing one class of ten students, were experienced General English teachers but relative newcomers to teaching EAP. Each week, as I conducted interviews with the teachers to uncover any problems with the texts and tasks in the book I became aware that their beliefs about teaching were often very different from my own. It was sometimes difficult to stay in the role of a neutral interviewer and not revert to that of a teacher trainer and mentor. I noticed that the interviews contained narratives and reflective evaluations of these teachers' classroom experiences using the new materials with their students, which put me in mind of an article by Peter Grundy (2001) about interpreting personal constructs of teaching through metaphors and presuppositions in narratives. I realised that these interviews were a rich source of data to uncover beliefs about teaching EAP at low proficiency levels. At this point, I went back to the teachers to ask for permission to use the interview data for research purposes and sought ethical approval for the study from the university ethics committee. I also applied for a small internal research grant within my faculty, which covered the transcription of about 7.5 hours of interviews and also committed me to completing the project.

Having collected the data and decided what I found interesting about it, I then had to frame my study and justify my analysis of the interview data by reviewing the literature on teacher beliefs. This turned out to be an iterative process that continued throughout the study. The articles I read gave me new ideas to inform the data analysis. For example, an article on teacher beliefs (Pajares, 1992) suggested that teachers' personal constructs of teaching were 'entangled domains' often containing beliefs that were inconsistent with each other. This idea prompted me to notice contrasting beliefs in the data and later to develop a reflective questionnaire in which belief statements are presented in opposing pairs to promote teacher reflection. Luker (2008)

recommends such interaction between reading the literature and collecting data for qualitative research in the social sciences, and it is also a feature of research in the hard sciences, according to a lecturer in petroleum engineering at my university. She explained that by modelling fluid flow in a computer simulation early on in their research, her students could better understand both the processes that occur in a real oil reservoir and the literature that explains the theory behind these processes.

I found it helpful to have several conference presentations, including the first ResTES event in Portsmouth 2011, which functioned as interim deadlines. I had to write short literature reviews – something I always find challenging – to support presentation proposals and I had an audience to test preliminary findings. In the past, I have viewed conference presentations as the end point of research and I have not written reports for publication. This time the conditions of the internal research grant required that I attempt to publish my findings and I decided to send an article to the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, which at the time was looking to publish more articles on research into practice. However, I considered that, with a case study of only two teachers, I did not have enough data to substantiate the claims I thought I could make about beliefs that might constitute barriers or success factors for teaching EAP. I decided to validate my findings by using the reflective questionnaire, mentioned above, to collect more data in an online survey, advertised through the BALEAP discussion list to EAP teachers working on pre-sessional courses in the UK.

When it came to writing the article, I found it quite difficult to put into practice myself what I'd been teaching students about the generic structure of research reports. My first draft was a narrative of my two research activities – case study interviews and online survey – and a description of the results. I wasn't able to step back far enough from the data in order to structure an argument and make more general claims that could be justified on the basis of the results. Following submission of my draft, I received feedback from two anonymous reviewers. Even though I was used to feedback from my co-authors, it was still a shock to be presented with the weaknesses in my writing. I had not included some key research articles, which critically evaluated the CLT approach, in my literature review, for which the reviewer helpfully provided references. The ideas in parts of my text did not flow logically and the reviewer could not follow my points. One reviewer suggested that 'a more critical account of the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data is required to enhance the credibility of this work' and then highlighted aspects which could be improved. I also had to introduce an element of reflexivity, acknowledging that my relationship with the two teachers I interviewed, as senior colleague, materials writer and teacher trainer, and my own views of what constitutes good EAP teaching might have impacted on the way I interpreted the data in the first phase of the study. The second phase, using the online reflective questionnaire to validate the findings of the original case study, was intended to achieve a more objective set of results. A research-active colleague gave me advice about how to address the reviewer comments systematically, placing sections of my first draft and the rewritten text side by side together with answers for each of the specific comments.

This study took over two years – with sporadic bursts of attention – from the initial data collection until the final submission of the redrafted article. During that time, I reflected on my own beliefs about research in relation to teaching EAP. I found that the study provided an opportunity to add to my intuitive understanding of approaches to EAP teaching and materials development by exploring some of the issues in a systematic way. The process of analysing data and attempting to relate it to the relevant literature sharpened my understanding of the difficulties

my students face in doing research. I struggled to frame a coherent theoretical background for the study because I did not have a sufficiently deep understanding of the considerable literature on teacher beliefs to write about this in a convincing way. The reviewers' feedback on the first draft of my article gave me a better appreciation of what constitutes rigour in data collection and analysis. I believe that as EAP teachers we must do more than simply teach language and skills, especially to postgraduate students. We need to support these students to engage with the research process with the depth and rigour that is expected at university. In order to do this effectively we need to have had experience of doing research ourselves.

Author details

Olwyn Alexander (o.alexander@hw.ac.uk) is based at Heriot-Watt University, UK, where she teaches EAP to applied sciences, engineering and management students on foundation, pre-sessional and in-sessional courses. Together with Sue Argent and Jenifer Spencer, she authored *EAP Essentials: A Teacher's Guide to Principles and Practice* and with Sue Argent she has produced two coursebooks, *Access EAP: Foundations* (2010) and *Frameworks* (forthcoming), published by Garnet Education. From 2010 to 2013 she was Chair of BALEAP. In that capacity, she took particular interest in in-service teacher development and was involved with the BALEAP TEAP Working Party in establishing an e-portfolio qualification for EAP teachers, based on the BALEAP TEAP Competency Framework. She has a wide range of research interests, always with the aim of understanding and developing her practice through research. She firmly supports the activities of the BALEAP Research and Publications Subcommittee, which seeks to increase research literacy amongst EAP practitioners.

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Telling stories about telling stories: reflections on the study of university Engineering lectures

Siân Alsop

Alsop, S., Nesi, H., & Moreton, E. (in press). The uses of storytelling in university Engineering lectures. *ESP Across Cultures*.

The theme of telling stories in this account operates at more than one level. In the publication to which this snapshot is linked, we looked at what sort of stories are told by Engineering lecturers. The current reflection discusses outcomes couched within a chronological account of how the research was undertaken: a story about telling stories, as it were.

An exposition

It seems remiss to reflect on the process of producing a piece of EAP research without first making a few comments on what we wrote about and its relevance to the field. The publication analyses and discusses data from the Engineering Lecture Corpus (ELC).[3] The ELC consists of 70 (and growing) undergraduate level Engineering lectures recorded at three universities (in the UK, Malaysia and New Zealand). We believe that EAP research does not necessarily mean classroom research, and that this kind of data is of interest to EAP teachers and learners because it allows engagement with authentic texts produced in a relevant academic context. The conclusions drawn demonstrate how discourse and linguistic analysis can be useful in EAP.

In terms of the architecture of the corpus, the lectures were recorded, transcribed and then annotated with what we are calling 'pragmatic' categories. Some of the categories have been further divided; 'storytelling' (the focus of our publication), for example, contains four subcategories, or genres (cf. Martin, 2008): anecdote, exemplum, narrative and recount (see Appendix I). The identification of the pragmatic categories shows that something more than the presentation of textbook information is occurring in the lecture theatre. When a story is told, for example, the lecture becomes a means through which the lecturer can convey personal professional wisdom (see Appendix II).

Our analysis of ELC data provides EAP teachers with information about the construction of lectures in different cultural contexts. The publication argues that, despite commonalities of delivery language (English), subject area (Engineering) and level (undergraduate), storytelling in

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[3]The ELC is currently under construction at Coventry University (www.coventry.ac.uk/elc). Two versions of the lectures will be made publicly available through the website: plain text transcriptions (TXT) and marked up and pragmatically annotated (XML) files.

engineering lectures is both contextually and culturally specific. We came to this conclusion by looking at the occurrence, distribution and linguistic realisation of each instance of storytelling across three cultural components of the ELC. This reflection largely focuses on the process of preparing the data for analysis.

The rising action

My story begins when I joined an existing project as a PhD student: the data was collected (the lectures had been recorded) and the transcription and annotation processes were partially undertaken. With three institutions contributing to the project, and the implementation of an unusual (so undocumented) and 'in progress' annotation system, my first task was to work towards consistency. The three key aspects of each file in the corpus (the raw text transcription, the structural mark-up and the more subjective linguistic annotation) were, somewhat inevitably, produced using varied methods and protocols, and significant gaps in the data existed.

It took me six months to gain a sense of what the corpus looked like and how it could and should look. I had been involved in building corpora before, but had done little on the analysis side. Armed with a passing acquaintance with XML, a vague notion that programming languages could be used to manipulate corpus files, and a growing anxiety about storing, processing, and making consistent various file types created according to various interpretations of systems of mark-up and annotation,[4] I began. Being a first year PhD candidate and latecomer to a project team of seasoned academics did little to reduce a significant period of procrastination at the start. Luckily for me, the team was patient, helpful, and have not (yet, fingers crossed) objected to the changes I have made.

The turning point for me in terms of gaining a sense of control over the data was attending an introductory workshop on Python (O'Donnell & Smith, 2011). Walking through how basic programming can be used to prepare and analyse corpus data opened up possibilities not only for analysis, but also for dealing with issues in consistency. We have now started to automate some of the more time-consuming tasks. For example, we create header information by exporting the required fields from a spreadsheet into the relevant XML files in the correct format. And we can mine the coordinates for plotting the dispersion and duration of the chunks of text that serve the pragmatic functions mentioned. Intuitively, this is not something that the inexperienced researcher and slight technophobe – and I very much include myself in this category – might feel comfortable about approaching; my experience was that it was a lot of fun and increased my motivation for the project. I also noticed that being forced to take a systematic approach to data organisation benefited other areas; it encouraged me to be more logical about the wider design of my thesis.

Understanding what can potentially be done with a corpus is frustrating as well as exciting, however. I found that a little programming knowledge inspired many ideas about what I wanted to do, but not how to do it. For example, a concern with the current system of annotation is that it relies on overlapping, and therefore invalid, XML. Although this does not impact on current analyses, it could ultimately prove to be a methodological and practical concern. Currently, we are not able to guarantee that the texts will not be subject to further alteration, which is a necessary condition for solutions such as creating stand-off files to replace the current inline annotation. So for now we treat the annotations as text rather than XML during analysis. As the corpus will be

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[4]We use the TEI standard (see http://www.tei-c.org/index.xml).

made publicly accessible (see www.coventry.ac.uk/elc) and we hope used by researchers and teachers, the final texts must be static, and the metadata must be fully machine-readable. Achieving the first should facilitate the second. My aim, by the time the corpus is finalised, is to gain the skills to implement a solution; the 'how' in addition to the 'what'.

No project is completed without the need arising for unforeseen adjustments. Part of the process of analysing what sorts of stories are told in the lectures involved relabeling the relevant pragmatic category. During two passes at reviewing annotations across the corpus, I judged it necessary to adjust Nesi and Ahmed's (2009) original working list category of 'personal narrative' twice in order to accurately capture and reflect what occurred in the data (see Alsop and Nesi [in press] for a full account).

Making modifications in two phases and eventually annotating four types of storytelling under one umbrella category was very labour-intensive. All the data had to be revisited and all of the annotations adjusted, which, as when they were originally identified, was a manual process. Realising that a change in focus was necessary – from whether the lecturer was delivering a narrative based on personal or professional experience to identifying their use of broader storytelling genres – was also a useful lesson in the need for a data-driven approach to refining the categories annotated. Recognising the need to make changes to one of the categories has prepared me for the possibility that such changes might be required again, particularly as new cultural components are added to the corpus.

My records of the evolution of the annotation system have been a valuable by-product of the process of challenging the original working list. The documentation of the decision-making process has informed three types of written output: my thesis methodology chapter; the ELC Manual for users (in progress); and conference presentations and proceedings (for example, Alsop and Nesi, in press). Documenting, and making available, the decision-making process taken so far also allows other researchers to replicate, build on, or perhaps challenge the categories we have used.

The research on which this reflection is based is the first publication that I have produced during my PhD and it was co-authored with my supervisor and a colleague. The most difficult and most useful part of the process was agreeing on the subjective annotation: the identification of instances of storytelling, their type, and the boundaries of the chunks of text to include. In addition to questions of content, questions of organisation were also raised in terms of allocating work, communicating and monitoring revisions, etc. The largely solitary demands of doing a PhD do not offer much opportunity for collaborative working, so taking on the ideas and opinions of two co-authors was new. I learnt a lot about how to organise a joint paper, from divvying up work to the practicalities of circulating, keeping track of, and agreeing on revised versions.

Another aspect of organisation that emerged as important was timing: negotiating a deadline of the first of January and the tight schedules of two busy colleagues. I was fortunate that my colleagues did not object to my constant emails over the Christmas period, but I realise now that it would have been more considerate to allow extra time when working jointly. My overriding feeling is that collaboration can be very reassuring when it comes to writing something that will be in the public domain.

Resolution?

A happy ending is perhaps demonstrated by the production of this account and the other publications and thesis material born from the processes and problems involved in identifying

and analysing one pragmatic category. We are not, however, without a cliff-hanger. Despite journal acceptance and the submission of a revised version four months ago, confirmation as to when the article discussed will be published has not yet been received.

Glossary

annotation: the identification of categories within the text body that could be described as subjective. In the ELC, categories include: 'defining', 'housekeeping', 'prayer', 'story', and 'summary'. Distinguished from (structural) *mark-up*

inline (annotation): the addition of metadata in the same location as the text (in this case, the body). The opposite of *stand-off*

metadata: data that describes data content

stand-off (annotation): annotation stored separately (or remotely) from the data it describes

static (text): a finalised version of a text that will not be subject to any change that would affect the indexing of tokens. For example, correction of transcripts, additions, etc

mark-up: the structural, objective elements of the metadata within the body of a text. For example, the identification of utterances, pauses, laughter etc. Distinguished from (here, pragmatic) *annotation*

TEI (Text Encoding Initiative): a standard for representing texts in digital form (see http://www.tei-c.org/index.xml)

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Appendix I:

Fig1: an example of an anecdote from the UK component of the ELC

Fig2: an example of an exemplum from the Malaysian component of the ELC

Fig3: an example of a narrative from the UK component of the ELC

Fig4: an example of a recount from the New Zealand component of the ELC

Appendix II:

Fig5: an example of a narrative of personal experience from the New Zealand component of the ELC

Telling stories, breaking down barriers: investigating the challenges of the internationalisation agenda through personal narrative

Helen Bowstead

> Just as each of us has the sense that our life story is unique, so too 'each of us knows that who we meet always has a unique story'.
> (Cavarero, 2000, p.xvi)

We all have a story, or perhaps more accurately, we all have stories. Narratives are fundamental to the way we communicate, construct and perceive our world and the worlds of those we come into contact with. In my research and in my writing, my aim is to explore the power of story-telling to challenge the cultural, educational and emotional barriers to academic success faced by international students who choose to study here in the UK. In this piece I offer a snapshot of a research project in which I set out to trouble the traditional researcher/participant relationship and to create an 'academic text' which explicitly includes the personal, the narrative and the 'other'.

Though international students have been coming to the UK for many years now, it has not always been easy for these students to adapt to life and study in the UK, or for universities to adequately meet these students' needs. Early research into the experiences of 'overseas' students attempted to identify and quantify the nature of the problems and challenges they encounter (Li and Kaye, 1998; Barker et al., 1991; Kinnell, 1990; Samuelowicz, 1987), and to recommend changes to institutional policies and practices that will impact positively on their experiences. The data paints a picture of a familiar set of issues; low level language skills, cultural differences, unfamiliar teaching and learning styles, homesickness, food, the weather. And yet, both in the research itself and in the institutional responses to the 'problems' faced by students, there is often a strong sense in which not only are international students represented as a homogeneous group, but also as a group that is deficient, lacking, less:

> Discourses of internationalisation often position Western and Asian education systems and scholarship in terms of binary opposites such as 'deep/surface',

'adversarial/harmonious' and 'independent/dependent' and uncritically attribute these labels to whole populations and communities of practice.
(Ryan & Louie, 2008, p. 65)

There is very little in these unhelpful binaries that encourages an engagement with the rich diversity of ways of knowing and learning that an internationalised student body brings to the UK context, nor is there any recognition of the highly complex personal and political reasons why an international student might have chosen to study in the UK.

> *Pary came to see me because she wanted to practise her spoken English. What shall we talk about, I ask her? She doesn't know. Well, tell me how you came to be in Plymouth, I say. Pary begins to talk. Of life under Saddam Hussein. Of chemical warfare and the rising levels of infertility that are the terrible consequence. Of twelve nights in the basement of her house, hiding in the dark. She tells me how she had to battle with a hostile administrative system to be here. Of her determination to complete her PhD and take back something of value to her homeland. To help rebuild Iraq.*

When Foucault (1981/2000) writes about his approach to research, he emphasises how it has always been carried out in response to the 'cracks, silent tremors, dysfunctions' he identified in the institutions he dealt with and his relations with others (as cited in St. Pierre, 2004, p. 293). Like many other HEIs, the university in which I work has plans to continue to increase its recruitment of international students, in the short term from China, India, Europe, South East Asia and the Middle East, and in the long term from Central and South America and Africa (The University of Plymouth's *Internationalisation Strategy*, 2009). As a member of the English Language Centre, my job, and that of my colleagues, is to teach and support international students, to help them improve their language skills and to adapt to UK academic culture. But though the institution's policies and strategies clearly state the expectation that university staff actively 'foster an inclusive community and respect of culture' (ibid., p. 4), I sense a tension, a 'dysfunction' in the way we talk about the (international) students we engage with. I have noticed that we use the word 'they' an awful lot. And while I know I am complicit in this, it bothers me. And I think it bothers me because when we say 'they', what we really mean is 'not us'.

Davies and Gannon (2006, p. 147) argue that personal narratives reflect and refract the way discourses work upon us and therefore, if we subject these narratives to an intense and focused gaze, we will find the means to disturb and destabilize 'sedimented thinking'. Failing to acknowledge that we are complicit in the construction and perpetuation of dominant discourses or that they impact on the way we think and behave, is to become a prisoner in a 'circle of certainty' (Freire, 2000, p. 39). Freire (2000) warns that if we believe in a world that can be too easily ordered and named, and if we believe in the existence of absolute truths, then we lose the ability to 'confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled' (p. 39).

> *Pary is having a difficult time. She is losing weight again and there is a blankness behind her eyes. She has been on placement in a local secondary school for the past few weeks so I haven't seen much of her. She thought she would be invited to teach, or perhaps share some of her expertise. But Pary has been treated very badly by some of the staff at the school. They ignore her in the corridor and send her on menial errands.*
> *'Miss, yes you Miss, I need some more lined paper'.*

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Working with Pary, listening to her stories and becoming her friend, has expanded my capacity to 'know'. By that I mean that our friendship has helped me to 'unveil' and trouble some of the powerful internal and external discourses that help to define and maintain notions of 'otherness'. Judith Butler asks us to consider 'who will be human and who will not' (Butler, 2004, p. xv), and I think there is something fundamentally important about that question and the impact it has on how we engage with the world.

We all tell the stories of our life, and though these stories help us to construct our individual identities, they are often multiple and rarely fixed. Life stories are, by their very nature, subjective and personal and therefore we might feel that we alone are the person best placed to tell our story. However, Adrianna Cavarero (2000) argues that there is a fundamental need for our stories to be told by another, that there is a power in the telling of another's story that is lacking in the telling of our own. As I listened to the stories Pary shared with me, I also became convinced that hers was a narrative that needed to be voiced, and one that I could and should give voice to. Pary has given her consent for me to use this material freely and unreservedly, and like the stories she tells me, I see this as a gift. Where Pary comes from, you do not need consent forms and ethics committees to engage in research, you are trusted to have your participants' interests and not your own at heart. Though I recognise that participants (and researchers) must be protected, I sometimes wonder whether a bond of trust and respect between researcher and participant is not at least as strong as any ethics protocol. Foucault argues that we have a duty to construct 'ourselves as ethical subjects in relation, not only to others, but to ourselves as well' (as cited in St. Pierre, 1997b, p. 410) and I am conscious that I must continually strive to honour and empower the people who tell me about their lives in both my research and my writing (Richardson, 1997). In order to do this, St. Pierre (1997b) argues that we must openly interrogate and acknowledge our 'angles of repose', that is the multiple identities and perspectives that colour our world view. I know that there are many personal, cultural and political influences that set me and Pary apart and that may also lead me to interpret and represent her world through a particular lens. I am Western and I am white. I am often woefully ignorant and sometimes I am capable of thoughts which are hard to defend. But despite our differences, Pary is also my friend and I know that it is because of this friendship that my 'research data' is so rich and multi-layered. Foregrounding the personal is risky and demands a more nuanced ethical response than simply hiding behind a protocol. I know I need to 'attend to the absences in [my] own work that are made intelligible by the difference of the other' (St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 186) and I do this by giving my work to those I have written about 'for examination, critique, and further dialogue' (Tillman-Healy, 2003, p. 744). Throughout this research project, in the spirit of friendship and also in order to meet the ethical obligations outlined by writers such as Tillman-Healy and St. Pierre, I have allowed Pary to read and respond to what I have written about her, and I have included those responses in my work.

A 'methodology of the heart' (Pelias, 2004) is no easy road. Once we become emotionally connected to those we 'study' we become enmeshed in a tangle of power relations and unforeseen consequences. As Tillman-Healy (2003, p. 743) points out, 'when we engage others' humanity, struggles, and oppression, we cannot simply shut off the recorder, turn our backs, and exit the field'. There is always a deep complexity to the power relationships that exist between researcher and participant, but when that person is your friend these become ever more tangled, infinitely more 'messy'. Engaging in a narrative approach to educational research certainly throws

up a myriad of tensions and conflicts and contradictions, yet I am still convinced that this type of work has a profound importance and a real validity. I cannot account for that validity in the same way that others may account for theirs, for the work is personal, subjective, perhaps disjointed at times, littered as it is with personal life experiences, and 'lines of flight' (Deleuze, 1988). Perhaps it also smacks of self-indulgence, even narcissism, but the intention is not to put myself or anyone else 'on display', but rather to use personal narrative as a device for exploring the way meaning and identity are constructed. Denzin says that 'we research and write not to gather the totality of social life but to interpret reflectively slices and glimpses of localized interaction in order to understand more fully both others and ourselves' (as cited in Tillman-Healy, 2003, p. 732). By telling Pary's story I have caught glimpses of the ways in which her world and mine connect and overlap. Fleeting and transitory, these insights resonate and reverberate through me, lifting veils and poking their noses into places I have forgotten or repressed, forcing me to confront and reassess the way I interact with 'others'. And in my research and writing I feel I have begun to respond to Pelias' persuasive call for academics to embrace 'empathetic' scholarship:

> Empathetic scholarship connects person to person in the belief in a shared and complex world. While it recognises that no two lives are identical, it celebrates when one says to another, 'Me too'. It welcomes identification, the witnessing of commonality, as well as separation, the claim of difference. Both require a taking in, a knowing and a feeling.
> (Pelias, 2004, p. 12)

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Embedding academic literacy into Business programmes of study: reflections on a collaborative approach

Caroline Burns & Martin Foo

Burns, C., & Foo, M. (2012). *Action research: Our reflections.* Presentation at the BALEAP PIM, University of Durham, Durham, UK.[5]

Introduction

This piece of writing traces the learning and professional development of two Higher Education lecturers since they began a collaborative action research project some three years ago. The work began with a practical problem: how to improve the learning of a specific cohort of learners? The questions shifted from, *what's going on here?* to *what happens if...* (Lofthouse, Hall & Wall, 2012) as we have attempted to understand our context, student needs and evaluate our interventions. The BALEAP PIM at Durham in July 2012, whose theme was *The Professionalisation of the EAP Practitioner*, however, prompted us to turn the lens on our own learning. Here, we tell the story behind the slides, of how our collaborative action research has contributed to our self-esteem, resilience and motivation (Day et al., 2006) as well as raising our profile and awareness of EAP in our respective schools.

Background

The fact that we are from different subject areas and are managed by different schools was significant to the aims of our work, which has been broadly to develop our international students' academic literacy via an embedded model, as opposed to a bolt-on model (Wingate, 2006) and by adopting the principles of Assessment for Learning by implementing a formative feedback intervention (Burns & Foo, 2012). Our concerns emerged from our different subject areas and roles. From an Accounting background, Martin had, until shortly before our work together began, taught mainly UK 'home' students. Changes in the school structure meant that he became involved in teaching new modules aimed at all business students, an increasing number of whom were from South East Asia. This is widely recognised as presenting a challenge for academic staff (Robson & Turner, 2007) and Martin was keen to avoid what is commonly known as the 'deficit model' with these students.

As an English Language lecturer, in 2006 Caroline was assigned the role of teaching in-sessional English Language and Academic Skills in Newcastle Business School, which is known at

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[5] Slides available at http://baleap.org.uk/media/uploads/pim/durham-june-9-2012/Foo-slides-0612.pdf

Northumbria University as ASk. This involved a move from teaching English for *Generic* Academic Purposes to English for *Specific* Academic Purposes, and like Martin, she felt this was a move into uncharted water. The CEM Model (Contextualisation, Embedding and Mapping) was developed by Sloan and Porter (2009) to assist ASk lecturers to design their syllabus. This work recognised the need for cooperation between the subject specialist and the ASk Lecturer in order to implement this model, and it was with this in mind that Caroline approached Martin to discuss the intended outcomes of a particular module, and the needs of the students.

Definition of action research and theoretical groundings

A broad and inspiring definition of action research is given by Reason and Bradbury in the introduction to *The Handbook of Action Research* (2006, p.1, slide 3). It is fundamentally distinct from traditional research in terms of its purpose, the relationships in which it is based, its differing conceptions of knowledge and its relationship to practice. Despite the huge diversity of the field, they hold that action research shares the five characteristics shown in slide 4. Action research often begins with a practical problem, as ours did, but we had, at first, perhaps overlooked the wider and more ambitious aims of creating knowledge which can help persons and communities to improve their well being, and thus create a more sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet, of which Reason and Bradbury (ibid.) point out, we are an intrinsic part.

Other ways of knowing are embraced by action researchers which recognise practitioners' tacit and embodied knowledge about teaching and learning (Polyani, 1958, as cited in Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) which accumulates through experience and reflection. In action research, the distinction between knowing and action is blurred, and theory is grounded in experience, in line with Dewey's educational theory and with Schön's influential 'reflective practitioner' model (Biesta, 2007). Working in a Higher Education context, it is perhaps not surprising that our understandings of epistemology and our approach to research were rather more traditional at the outset. Yet, working in a post-1992 University where the focus has generally been more on teaching, we were also well aware of traditional divisions between teaching and research and the status differences awarded to each. Thus, we have found that the diverse perspectives on what it means 'to know' outlined here, are liberating and inspiring for practitioner researchers.

Questions and action research cycles

The problems we identified in the beginning (slide 7) are familiar to BALEAP conference delegates. The overall action research spiral (slide 11), shows the first two cycles were largely concerned with diagnosis, specifically finding out the students' language abilities and prior experience. The *Finding our Feet* stage (slide 11) is encapsulated in an earlier poster presentation (slide 8) which draws an analogy of setting out on a journey: doing a pre-journey check, taking a tool box in case of difficulties etc. The final image shows a two lane road heading towards the mountain, at the peak is our goal: 'successful student status'. In Caroline's mind, Martin and herself are in different lanes, but crucially side by side, heading in the same direction – an often elusive position for EAP teachers, due to status differences between them and their colleagues in other disciplines. The poster contains an amusing image of two people on a tandem which underlines the collaborative aspect and gave rise to the title of an early conference paper: 'Working in tandem towards successful student status'.

Looking back now, we feel that this analogy was rather simplistic – students are not like cars, to be fixed by the correct tools. Perhaps the idea that we would design an intervention which would lead to a measurable improvement in student outcomes such as grades was based on a technological role of professional action which fails to recognise the complexity of the context and the fact that teachers' decisions are complex, and often moral ones (Biesta, 2007). Further reading has led us to realise that academic literacy involves a deeper engagement with epistemology in the disciplines than we were previously aware of (Lea & Street, 1998) and that other metaphors such as learning as becoming or learning as being part of a community might be more appropriate (Hodkinson & McLeod, 2010). How we might take these understandings forward in a more practical way is likely to be another chapter in our story.

Quality and ethics

How can we judge the quality of our work? This is a question we have needed to address when evaluating and disseminating our work. Yet because action research differs so greatly from dominant research models, it requires different types of evidence and validation processes (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Personal engagement and insider stance create 'knotty challenges' (Zeni, 2009, p. 256) which require researchers to untangle the potentially conflicting roles of practitioner/researcher. 'Am I trying to improve my teaching or enhance my data?' is a question Zeni prompts us to ask. The authors mentioned here point to the importance of ethical decision-making based on caring, and social responsibility as a determiner of quality in practitioner research.

Collaborative inquiry – egalitarian relationships

English for Academic Purposes is still struggling to assert itself as a discipline in its own right, and is often perceived as a service within universities. EAP staff are often managed in a 'centre' or 'unit' rather than a department or subject area, and are frequently subject to different contracts and conditions to other discipline areas, which can lead to feelings of marginalisation. However, Caroline found that by participating in an inquiry as an equal with Martin enhanced her status in the eyes of both students and academic staff, perhaps most importantly in her own eyes. Whilst we had to make a significant commitment to do extra work in our own time, support has been more forthcoming since we have tangible outcomes and achievements.

Gradually, what might have been an unequal relationship, in which Caroline as an EAP lecturer approached the subject specialist in a different school to help her understand the needs of his cohort, evolved into a democratic partnership. Our relationship is somewhat atypical in a context where EAP lecturers are often seen to be working for, not with the subject specialists. This aspect was specifically mentioned in the introduction to the BALEAP conference by the keynote speaker, Dr. Julie King.

Gaining confidence

The APT (Applauding Teaching) award was, at the time our enquiry began, an initiative that was being promoted by the University to encourage innovative approaches to teaching and learning designed to meet university Learning and Teaching Strategic objectives. We won this award, twice in fact, and this certainly did increase our motivation and self-belief. It also gave us a sense of power, not in the traditional sense of having power to be wielded *over* somebody or something, but a more positive sense of 'power from within' (Gaventa & Cornwell, 2006) and a sense we had

the power to make a difference. It also marked the start of our deep learning, because in the dissemination of our work we were obliged to engage not only *in* our own research but also *with* research of others (Hall, 2009) as we have shown here. The publication of our first papers in peer reviewed journals (Burns & Foo, 2011; 2012) felt like a great achievement, and has acted as a catalyst to do more.

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Researching one's own approach to EAP management and curriculum: how a library bound researcher became an EAP ethnographer

Christopher Macallister

Macallister, C. (2013). *Control and autonomy in EAP management: The prescriptive curriculum as the path to professional freedom*. Presentation at the BALEAP Biennial Conference, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK.

My reflective narrative focuses on the challenges I encountered when I began to explore the approach my colleagues and I at Durham have taken towards the EAP curriculum and its implications for how we manage the pre-sessional teaching team. What began as a somewhat introspective exercise in theorising practice became a wider research project which sought to understand how our colleagues experienced the pre-sessional curriculum. To what extent would those teaching our programme agree with the hypothesis that the constraints of our curriculum actually liberate the teacher?

My reflective narrative is also the story of how I moved from my comfort zone of library based research into going out into the 'field' and embarking on primary research. Ultimately this move from theorist to ethnographer, while time consuming and potentially hazardous, helped make my on-going reflections about what I do at Durham all the more meaningful.

This snapshot into my research will follow the journey from my initial personal reflections, to informal conversations with my management colleagues, to finally the breakout moment when I was ready to ask the teaching team about their lived experience. Along the way I will try to explain the rationale for what I did, and how my thinking was influenced by my interests in EAP, ethnography, and the wider social sciences.

The origins of my research: a response to professional experience

My research has its origins in my experiences as part of the Durham English Language Centre's summer pre-sessional management team in 2011 and 2012. As a result of a substantial increase in student numbers our teaching team had had to expand considerably by 2012. For the first time, almost fifty percent of the teachers were new to the centre. The main impact of this for us as managers was that many more teachers than usual would be unfamiliar with the programme and thus need significant support to teach our curriculum.

This was a particular issue for our programme because over the years the Durham curriculum has developed into an in-house produced, highly bespoke, prescriptive course with

materials and aims provided for over ninety percent of the lessons. Through this prescriptive curriculum we are able to project a coherent pedagogical vision of what we saw EAP as being about. However, for some teachers new to our programme getting to grips with our approach and the concepts embedded in it has been a real challenge. Thus, providing support and leadership to the teaching team was central to my role. However, as Foucault (as cited in Taylor, 1986) pointed out, power in the workplace is rarely a one way, top down affair. Teachers inevitably adapted and 'subverted' the curriculum through the process of enacting it.

However, what sparked further reflection on my part was some of the feedback that came out of our successful accreditation by BALEAP in 2012. In particular the feedback that focused on the role of teachers in curriculum development. Should the role of teachers be primarily to provide feedback, or is there a significant role for teachers in writing materials and defining the curriculum? Our prescriptive approach greatly limits the extent to which teachers can be involved in actually writing materials. Thus on the Durham pre-sessional the role of teachers in curriculum development is more to communicate back to the management team what works and what needs adapting or discarding.

Theorising practice (i): a conflict between practice and values?
In terms of raw results our approach to curriculum is unproblematic; a very high percentage of our students progress to their programmes at the end of summer and our programme receives excellent student feedback. However, as I reflected on the relationship between teachers and curriculum, I found myself feeling mildly uneasy about some of the ideological and philosophical implications of our approach.

It could be argued that professional autonomy has long been central to the identity of the ELT/EAP teacher and indeed the communicative approach. Texts by Scrivener (2011) and others that set out to train and guide EFL teachers present the ELT practitioner as a creative individual with the freedom to make choices; they are more than mere 'materials operators' (Underhill, 1989). Indeed, the Dogme/Teaching Unplugged movement is in many ways a reassertion of the ELT professional as a free, creative, unconstrained agent.

My mini crisis of faith only deepened when I reflected on how the discipline of management studies approached the question of professional autonomy. The further I read into the work of business 'gurus' such as Drucker (2001), the more it seemed that it was an article of faith that you should refrain from micromanagement and set your employees free. I was then further troubled, thinking back to my previous career as a politics lecturer, when I reflected on my own political and social context: Western liberalism. Arguably, the wider culture of Western liberal democracy has traditionally privileged autonomy and freedom of expression. Indeed, Fukuyama (1993) and others have argued that it is liberal values like individual autonomy that are the reason why Western civilization has been successful; for better or for worse (Hanson, 2002). Therefore, were we at Durham guilty of turning teachers into 'materials operators', had we become micromanagers in conflict with liberal thinking?

Theorising practice (ii): a rationale for our approach; or trapped by group think?
My response to questions I had raised was to open up my thought process and discuss these issues with my colleagues on the management team. Over post accreditation coffees and lunches we began to reach some conclusions. We were unanimous in our belief that a pre-sessional course needed a single coherent pedagogical vision. However, we also agreed that if taken at face

value our curriculum could be seen to be a constraint on a teacher's professional autonomy. Yet, this did not seem to ring true to us; the majority of our teachers returned year after year, and they were all opinionated professionals who spoke their mind.

Our discussions led us to suggest that while our prescriptive curriculum determined what went into the lessons, how the content of the lesson was brought to life was up to the teacher. Thus, we reasoned that by taking away the burden of writing their own materials, the teacher was freed to expend their energies on actually teaching rather than in a search for a suitable text to work with. Micromanagement was still a potential danger, but as long as certain conditions were fulfilled, then the teacher would still retain autonomy in their classroom. However, while it was initially quite comforting to work out a rationale for what we did that did not fundamentally conflict with the core values of my profession, and indeed liberal democracy, I remained troubled. Perhaps we at Durham were caught up in a loop of our own self-sustaining logic? To play devil's advocate: was it surprising that we had found a way of justifying our approach? Thus, reflecting once again on my previous life as a politics lecturer, I began to be concerned that we might be trapped in a classic group think situation (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

An EAP ethnographer emerges: primary research as the route to meaningful reflection
Through a BA in classics, an MA in international relations, an MA in applied linguistics, and several conference papers I had maintained an academic identity as a library based researcher. However, if I was to test my hypothesis that teachers found our curriculum liberating, I would need to become a primary researcher and ask the pre-sessional teaching team for their thoughts. I began the process of leaving behind my comfort zone by reflecting on the qualitative primary research that I was already familiar with and that I found most rewarding to read. As part of my work at Durham I had already used ethnographic projects to develop students' language and academic skills. I was therefore familiar with possible research methodologies and the ethical debates over the role of the researcher. As a result of further reading (O'Reilly, 2005), I began to think in terms of using unstructured interviews to capture the teachers' beliefs about the curriculum. However, I still felt that I needed further input as to how I would go about conducting the research and then making sense of my qualitative data. Here I turned to the work of Adrian Holliday. During my MA I had found his work on qualitative research (Holliday, 2007) thought provoking, and I had enjoyed his keynote lecture at the Cutting Edges conference in July 2012.

What drew me to utilise Holliday's work was his conception of qualitative primary research as a response to the problems and puzzles we encounter in our professional lives (Holliday, 2007, p. 23). In particular, Holliday's approach that qualitative research can explore the 'underlife' (Canagarajah, 2001, p. 205) of a pedagogical situation, aiming to uncover 'what else is going on' and whether 'it is what we think is going on' (Holliday, 2007, p. 66) seemed to be what I wanted to do with my research. Moreover, Holliday's argument that research is a profoundly ideological practice (2007, p. 13) resonated with my theoretical library based experiences of research as both a conceptual and practical enterprise. Finally, as I started to conduct primary research for the first time, I began to appreciate his claim that qualitative research generates greater and greater complexity and that the researcher needs to embrace rather than resist this (Holliday, 2007).

Feeling more intellectually prepared for my task I thus pushed forward into the 'field' and engaged with my teaching colleagues as a researcher rather than a manager. The results of my fieldwork, and whether or not they confirm my hypothesis, form the content of the paper I will

be giving at the BALEAP Biennial 2013 conference and the slides that accompany this narrative. In terms of my new identity as a primary researcher, I am looking forward to developing new projects and I am considering the possibility of beginning an EdD in the not too distant future.

Author details

I joined Durham University's English Language Centre in 2010. My main role since then has been as a member of the summer pre-sessional management team. Currently, I am deputy director of the pre-sessional programme and in-sessional programmes coordinator (maternity cover). I also teach an undergraduate module on socio-linguistics and contribute to our MA TESOL programme. My main research interest is focused on EAP management. I am particularly interested in different strategies and styles of management; this was the subject of my paper at the 2013 Biennial conference. I've also begun to take an interest in how technology can enhance programme coordination. I have further interests in professional development within the EAP sector, and in critical EAP and its relationship to postmodernism and the idea of language as a local practice. I have given papers that explore these issues at recent Professional Issues Meetings in Durham, Southampton, and at IATEFL Glasgow 2012. Email: c.j.macallister@durham.ac.uk

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Measuring up?': reflections on assessment in EAP

Nathaniel Owen

> When you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind.
> William Thomson, 1st Baron Kelvin, 1824 – 1907
> [PLA, vol. 1, 'Electrical Units of Measurement', 1883]

My academic journey has brought me from studying International Relations at Master's level at Aberystwyth to the field of language testing at PhD. Youngsters do not typically reply 'language tester' when asked about their future career trajectory. It is an unusual journey that arrives in the present via Plato's Republic, the deontological ethics of Immanuel Kant and the classical liberalism of J. S. Mill. This philosophical grounding meant I was well-placed to consider the epistemological underpinnings of competing interpretations of language instruction, particularly the nature of 'knowledge' of language in the discipline and the search for evidence to back up statements connected to claims about such knowledge. I 'fell' into English language teaching, initially as a means of supporting myself whilst living in Spain. From there, my interests grew in exam preparation (IELTS, CAE and FCE) and the notion of English for academic purposes more generally. My appreciation of the importance of language testing grew from my MA in Applied Linguistics at the University of Leicester, in which one of the elective components focused on language testing.

Testing of any kind is a form of measurement. As length is measured in metres, temperature in degrees and weight in kilograms, so test candidates are measured according to a common scale. Tests are designed to capture something about individuals' 'language ability' for the purposes of making decisions about those individuals. These decisions effectively act as a prediction about a student's future performance. Decisions must be made on established, dependable and defensible cut scores; therefore, language testing represents the application of scientific measurement of an unobservable construct, language ability. Inferences are made based on the observable performance of a student in a localised setting. Language testing research may focus on the skills that are being tested, the means of gathering information for assessment, comparison of qualitative and quantitative means of information gathering, or the ethics and

consequences associated with a testing programme. Such research may be summarised as focusing on *test validity*: 'an integrated, evaluative judgment of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationale support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on test scores' (Messick, 1989, p. 13).

More generally, testing has been criticised by a number of different academic practitioners, perhaps most famously by the post-structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), he identifies examinations as a process that is inherent to an education system that seeks to legitimise a cultural status quo. Examinations thus act as a form of behavioural regulation of the individuals in a society. More than this, the success of an individual within hierarchical power relations in a society is directly linked to success in examinations. Foucault characterises exams as a 'ritualised panopticon'; the criteria adopted by any institution act as the form of observation that ensures participants adhere to deterministic systems that legitimise and enforce social hierarchies and dominant culture. Marks or grades beyond the minimum acceptable cut scores determine the level of one's success in that domain, and serve as evidence of hard work that is visible to employers, education leaders and peers. Test scores may have a similar influence on teaching staff. Although test scores are intended to be indicative of student performance and aptitude in a domain, they are also used to judge the success of individual teachers, something they were not designed to do. Shohamy (2001) identifies the 'scientific' test as a tool of ideology rather than an emancipatory tool that levels the playing field for all test takers, as individuals with greater access to educational resources have a great advantage over their peers who are less able to prepare for and learn the specific features of the test.

Within the context of language testing, EAP courses may be used to prepare students for high-stakes tests (such as IELTS, TOEFL or Pearson PTE) as well as for higher education study more generally (Moore & Morton, 2005). In addition to a high-stakes test of English as a foreign language for Tier 4 visa regulations, students may be required to undertake a programme of academic English if their score is regarded as insufficient for direct progression to their elected programme. Academic pre-sessionals often culminate in an internally-devised test which acts as final gatekeeper. For overseas students, testing will form a large part of their application and admissions procedure, before they have even begun their elected academic programme.

My own MA research was undertaken in response to a call by Pearson Education Ltd in order to evaluate the content validity and educational appropriateness of the Pearson PTE Academic as an exit test for a pre-sessional course of academic English. Data for the study constituted test scores of a single cohort of students (n = 59) in both the Pearson PTE and the University of Leicester's internal test of academic English. Results across individuals were directly compared. Fifty-five of the participants in the study were Chinese nationals. These participants were easily persuaded of the importance of the study; feedback from participants highlighted both strong altruistic and personal motivation for participating. Students felt that the research could improve the testing experience for future students. On a personal level, students were keen to explore their level of proficiency, compare the test with existing tests such as IELTS, and were enticed by the opportunity for further exam practice. In 2012, there were more than 78,000 Chinese students studying in the United Kingdom, not including an additional 11,000 from Hong Kong, far greater than any other group from either EU or non-EU countries (UKCISA, n.d.). The high proportion of Chinese students in the sample is therefore consistent with this observation.

Findings were presented to an audience of EAP staff, comprising full-time teachers, senior teachers and those with responsibility for the administration of pre-sessional courses and end-of-course examinations. The audience was shown the findings related to the participants' end-of-course results and their scores awarded on the Pearson PTE Academic. Decisions made on the basis of these two different instruments were compared. The implications of these findings were then discussed in groups. This fed into a wider discussion of testing, reliability and validation, and how teachers can be more involved in the production and administration of English language assessments on university pre-sessionals.

The study provided impetus for critical reflection on the end-of-course examinations. As part of the research, the University's in-house test was 'reverse-engineered' to produce a test specification (Davidson & Lynch, 2002). Test specifications, as a blueprint of test creation, are a valuable tool to create reliable and valid tests. The spec is now available as a tool for producing parallel items for use in future tests, or as the basis for reflecting upon existing item forms and considering whether they address the underlying traits which the end-of-course test is designed to assess. This process of reverse-engineering directly fed into my PhD, which is concerned with developing a critical approach to reverse engineering, involving academic staff and students, two key categories of stakeholder in a test of academic English. The impact of my PhD lies in encouraging institutions to gather multiple perspectives on test design and content, critically reflecting on the claims associated with in-house tests, and whether these are defensible given the content and task types of the test.

There is no uniform method of determining whether students are ready to progress to their chosen academic pathway from a pre-sessional course (Banerjee & Wall, 2006). 'Off-the-shelf' instruments such as the Pearson PTE or IELTS, may not be sufficiently representative of the EAP construct to provide meaningful information from which to make a decision. Such a determination must be made by individual institutions in consultation with key stakeholders. EAP courses, unlike IELTS preparation courses, are not designed to facilitate successful completion of a particular test. They are designed to provide individual-level information about the capabilities of that individual with respect to the demands of higher education in the UK. IELTS task 2 for example does not rely on critical reading for successful completion, but rather on rhetorical and lexical proficiency in constructing a sustained argument (ibid., p. 54).

All of the above underscores the need for testing to be a collaborative activity, involving as many stakeholders as possible. Individual departments, students, administrators, educators, researchers and politicians all constitute stakeholders in English language examinations. All may be interested for different reasons, and may demand different data from the testing process. Departmental assessment policy needs to be explicitly stated to each group of stakeholders, and evidence of this policy presented, if outcomes are challenged by any stakeholder. This demands considerable time and resources. Different stakeholders require different forms of evidence. Students want detailed feedback allowing them to diagnose their own performance and target areas for future improvement. University admissions officers require simply presented information allowing them to compare students to pre-defined criteria, thus allowing efficient decision-making (Banerjee & Wall, 2006).

Ultimately, practitioners in language testing and EAP must negotiate these decisions to determine whether the testing practice of their institution is in line with the goals of that institution. The context of test administration is an important consideration, as are the stakeholders who require output from the testing process. Test validation is thus a multi-

disciplinary concern which requires multiple voices to construct a convincing validation argument. Testing is undeniably useful and important, and is deeply embedded in numerous cultures. It is unlikely that high-stakes testing will be supplanted by alternative selection processes in the near future. Language testing researchers therefore have a key role in influencing institutional policy and ensuring that academic standards are both rigorous and ethically implemented.

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Challenges of a teacher: focus on learner-centred teaching in preparing students for international MA study

Larysa Sanotska

Sanotska, L. Implementing a personalizing approach in teaching academic writing (Article under review).

Introduction

Every year hundreds of international students come to Britain to start or continue their education. A part of them arrive from Eastern Europe, including post-Soviet countries with traditionally different style of teaching. New tasks are set for EFL university teachers worldwide due to the wide spread of students' academic mobility and role of English as a Lingua Franca in international education. Academic mobility is also among the areas which are currently being addressed by scholars in education. So, as a practitioner who wants to grow professionally and a researcher who wants to widen the horizons of her expertise, I considered the challenge of studying the problems which Ukrainian students might encounter in European universities. Quite a few of my former BA students are presently taking MA courses abroad (or have recently completed ones) and, in general terms, I am aware of some of their difficulties. So, how can I, an EAP teacher, prepare my current Ukrainian students for western academia? What skills and competencies would they need to survive in a western university? I asked myself those questions and tried to find answers in the process of teaching and doing research.

Educational challenges and practitioner research

In Ukrainian universities Academic English is usually part of General English. Teaching writing in English on the whole, and teaching Academic Writing as a part of it, has been subsumed into teaching General English too. Sometimes this means that Academic Writing is an optional module. Taking into consideration the fact that in British universities academic writing is a paramount skill, I compiled a Course in Academic Writing, which was based on Jordan (1990; 1997) and Hyland (2006), among others, and started running it with a group of BA students in the English Philology Department (Department of English and American Studies). This group was chosen because a part of them were planning on studying abroad. I started with needs analysis, which included, as usual, notes on group description and motivation, their current proficiency and motivation, diagnostic testing and identifying priorities. Since the beginning of the course I wanted to study its effectiveness, which would imply not only results of formative and summative assessment, but would 'go much deeper'. I wanted to apply qualitative

approaches to investigate students' learning throughout the course. The results would provide me with better understanding of what students do, what goes wrong and why.

I had never done this kind of research before and I felt the need for some guidance in qualitative data collection and, especially, data analysis. That is why I participated in two research workshops, which I found extremely helpful. The BALEAP ResTES event 'Methodologies for Researching EAP Contexts, Practices and Pedagogies' with Diana Ridley and Kyla Steenhart as main speakers helped me to understand the relationship between quantitative and qualitative paradigms in research. The IATEFL Research SIG event 'Qualitative Research in Language Education' conducted by the famous author and methodologist David Nunan, which I attended afterwards, focused on data collection criteria, general approaches to sampling, interview types and techniques, etc (see Kaur [2013] and Sanotska [2012a] for reports on the event). Both workshops gave me new insights into analytical procedures from various perspectives and inspired me to apply various data collection techniques. I also familiarized myself with reliability and validity measures in qualitative classroom research and, consequently, tried to implement those principles. One of the most problematic issues for me was how to proceed from the collected data to the outcomes. What exactly does the data tell me? Nunan suggested several approaches to data analysis: finding patterns, meaning condensation, a 'grounded' approach and developing themes. In my research I discovered several patterns in students' behaviour, e.g., their subconscious resistance to collaboration or inability to learn without teacher guidance. I applied the meaning condensation technique to summarize the interview data, and the 'grounded' approach not only refocused my research, but also allowed me to develop new themes afterwards. The patterns I discovered gave the research a learner-centredness focus. Although the research plan I compiled in the Nunan workshop was only a basic skeleton, it greatly facilitated planning my research. In this snapshot I am going to reflect on the beliefs that underpinned my course design and on the different stages of gathering, condensing and analyzing research evidence.

Environmental and conceptual problems: shifting the focus of the classroom
Traditional methods of instruction in higher education in Ukraine, which originate from the model of standardization, inevitably prepare students for artificial learning and working environments. Ukrainian students often confess that they feel frustrated when they start their studies in western universities because the teachers expect them to do vast amounts of work on their own, plan their own learning, come to the lecture prepared to be able to understand it. In other words, the students are meant to take responsibility for their own learning. Implementing approaches/methods that are already common in Western European academic cultures, e.g. collaborative learning, would prevent students from feeling frustration and a lack of confidence in their educational abilities. Collaborative learning has long been a feature of the western foreign language classroom and a part of the learner-centred approach. Teacher centredness, which is still common in post-Soviet tertiary education, on the other hand, excludes learners' conscious and creative participation in learning, which makes it less effective. Since the last decades of the last century, the majority of the EFL textbooks produced in Europe have been designed for teachers to follow approaches which promote students' autonomy and cooperation in and out of the classroom. Western scholars give evidence of the benefits of collaboration/cooperation in foreign language acquisition, in particular of the positive effect of shifting the focus of the classroom from the teacher to the students by developing learner autonomy strategies in

secondary and higher education (Burkert, 2011; Kemp, 2010). According to Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008), teachers do not control their students' learning, 'learners make their own paths', which does not mean that teaching does not influence learning (p. 199). Collaborative learning implies sharing knowledge, bringing students' previous experiences to the group and learning from the group's existing practices. It is doubtless that such style of instruction encourages students' creativity, motivation, enhances their language and study skills, at the same time as developing their collaborative skills. Those in a nutshell are beliefs that underpinned my course design.

In order to minimize the teacher's domination in the classroom and prepare students for surviving in more democratic academic cultures I conducted research which focused on students' behaviour, needs, learning styles and preferences. The research provided data about the students' preferred ways of acquiring skills and learning to use systems of the target language. The results allowed me to identify two sub-groups of learners: 'the teacher-oriented' and 'the independent' (Sanotska, 2013). The research showed that the 'teacher-oriented' students, who expect total control and guidance from the teacher, were a minority who 'followed the habitual ways'. The majority, 'the independent learners', at once expressed clear decisiveness in taking responsibility for their own learning. These results suggested an urgent need for reshaping the traditional classroom by shifting the focus from teacher to learner, and provided some guidelines.

My plan was to focus my teaching on the students and create opportunities for collaborative learning in my course: I implemented collaborative activities, encouraged students to discuss tasks in groups and come up with their own ideas and suggestions, collaborate in writing out-of-class compositions, write pair and group compositions, etc. To gauge the effectiveness of the approach I observed the class in the process and made notes, after the lesson I wrote down critical reflections and tried to evaluate the lesson. I also analysed students' feedback given in interviews and narratives. In order to investigate the problem from different angles I combined different methods of data collection, which proved useful: maps and SCORE charts (to see which sector of the classroom is engaged more), my own observation notes, my own lesson plans, diary entries, copies of students' writing, interview protocols, open-ended questionnaire responses, etc. Even though, I honestly confess, there were some inevitable pitfalls, on the whole, the activities were successful because I saw that the initially hesitant students enjoyed the benefits of collaborative work.

In the next phase of my project, I felt that in order to respond to the needs of the students and foster learner involvement I should be flexible in the choice of teaching methodology. I read and reread the interview scripts, questionnaire answers, students' narratives, copies of 'collaborative' and 'individual' compositions, and finally, a new pattern appeared. Suddenly I realized that personal information is most meaningful to students because it relates to their immediate environment, and I felt that by personalizing the tasks I could exploit the students' potential more effectively. I felt that personality factors are more significant for learning strategy preferences than socio-cultural variables or educational background, and personalization is an important aspect in learner-centred teaching. I went back to my data. My diary entries ('same routine again, why can't I think of something to 'brighten' the lesson?'), and what was 'condensed' anew from the students' interview scripts ('boring', 'unimportant', 'tired') directed my next step. I came up with the idea to try applying creative writing techniques in one Academic Writing lesson and study the students' behaviour and reflections. I had taught creative writing before and realized that that was exactly the format I needed to motivate the students by providing them

with the opportunity to 'carry in' their personal information, share it with the others and be able to exploit their hidden potential. Creative writing strategies of putting oneself into the picture, selecting the most appropriate verbalization of one's experience and, finally, administering a piece of writing without format or lexical/stylistic restrictions allowed me to personalize classroom activities and, as I observed, sufficiently increase students' involvement in the process of the lesson. I interviewed the students afterwards, and the results allowed me to conclude that the techniques proved effective in arousing motivation, building and expanding vocabulary, as well as distinguishing between formal and informal writing styles (Sanotska, 2012b).

Conclusion

The Academic Writing Course for Ukrainian English Philology BA students was designed in response to rapidly changing demands and specific challenges that academic mobility creates nowadays and according to students' requirements and constraints. The on-going practitioner research not only helped modify the course by providing a deeper understanding of the students' approach to learning, but also offered necessary guidelines for establishing a more effective mode of running the course. It allowed in-depth study of students' needs and meeting them in order to make the course more appropriate for Ukrainian university students planning to study overseas. By applying the insights of the research workshops I attended into my own research I, most importantly, learnt how to analyse the data, including interpretation of data informing understanding and suggesting future action. Moreover, in the course of undertaking this detailed research, other themes emerged, suggesting new directions in research, among them critical thinking and collaboration and L1/L2 correlation in Academic Writing lessons and I am going to investigate these in the future.

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Joining a research community

Bill Soden

Soden, B. *The role of written feedback in the development of critical academic writing: A study of the feedback experience of non-native speakers in taught master's programmes* (PhD thesis, in progress).

This story is a set of reflections on my experience of doctoral study, an attempt to look beyond the frustrations of working full-time and carrying out part-time research. I write this in the final stages of the process, aiming to submit the thesis within a matter of weeks, and already anticipating the 'trauma' of the viva. When drafting a section of my introductory chapter on my motivation to undertake doctoral research, the rationale for case study research of taught master's students seemed clear. The research on written feedback would bring together my EAP experience, focusing on how pre-sessionals impacted on the taught master's experience, while also informing my teaching and feedback practice on MA programmes. But on reflection, this seemed to leave out a significant driver, the desire for recognition in my own academic community. Operating '...at the margins of academic life' (Chanock, 2007, p. 273), as we do in EAP, I suppose I felt a need for the PhD badge, as recognition that I belonged. This narrative reflects my struggle to join the research community, highlighting what I learnt from the process.

Recursive processes

I wanted to understand how my pre-sessional students over the years coped with the 'hidden discourse' of argument in postgraduate writing (Andrews, 2007). I wondered whether feedback really had the potential to engage them in a dialogue that inducted them into their disciplines (Hyatt, 2005). But this summary of my research topic was not what I wrote in my original proposal, which I returned to several times in the first months of the study; I had vacillated for several years before beginning the research, concerned that I needed a very strong proposal. I understand now that worrying about perfection at the proposal stage can simply be time lost.

Finding that the proposal did not have to be fully formed at the point of departure was evidence that PhD study was not the linear process that I believed it to be; in fact, my experience has been that it is much more recursive, characterised by a series of stop-start stages. There was the typical frustration of moving forward in short bursts, usually holidays, only for work to take over for long periods (running pre-sessionals), and then needing to re-acquaint myself with the study. In the early stages, after gathering interview data, I would spend weekends and evenings listening and transcribing, but only have time for preliminary or partial analysis. I would work feverishly on a draft chapter to get a quick turnaround of feedback from my supervisor, but leave

the draft with revisions pending for several months. On the other hand, the on-off nature of the research was not all bad, picking up where I had left off often involved seeing things afresh, with the benefit of more reading, and it forced me to re-read transcripts and listen again and again to my participants' voices.

For my master's dissertation some ten years earlier, I had written the literature review (LR) before data collection and analysis. Delving into the literature on thesis writing to design thesis workshops led me to view the LR as relatively straightforward, a way of situating the study, identifying gaps and leading to the research questions. Thus, I began with a rather static view of the LR, one that assumed that it could, and perhaps should, be written in the early stages, to be tidied up later. In reality, the burst of research activity in my topic area in the first two years of the research forced me to treat the LR as an ongoing and evolving chapter, even into the final stages of the write up, where I find myself positioning my research alongside the relevant findings that have emerged in recent months.

Kamler and Thomson's excellent work on helping doctoral students to write (Kamler & Thompson, 2006) was unknown to me when I began my study, but I'd recommend it to all budding doctoral researchers and EAP staff who support PhD students. Kamler and Thomson's metaphor of the literature as 'occupied territory' now seems very apt to me, and after two substantial re-drafts of the LR, I have come to see how doctoral researchers can occupy parts of the landscape, using a knowledge of what is agreed and what is contested to position themselves in relation to their topics

Writing down versus writing up

In my EAP role, I had led workshops for several years on dissertation and thesis writing, so I felt I had a certain amount of 'declarative knowledge' to write a good thesis. What became evident, however, was the gap between knowing what I should do in my writing, and putting that knowledge into practice. The same problems I frequently discussed with my students confronted me at different stages. I realised that I could not expect to be a 'good writer', and that in order to become a better writer, I had to go through the same pain other researchers suffer; as a result, I now empathise so much more with my students and really relate to the challenges they face.

I was lucky to enjoy a good relationship with my supervisor, a long-time colleague, and I appreciated his hands-off approach. Though supportive and helpful at key points, I think he refrained from giving me too much advice on the basis that I might feel patronised, and that I didn't need it. It was not my supervisor, but a colleague completing her PhD, who advised me not to waste time drafting texts in the early stages, since much of the thesis is usually written in the final six months before submission. At the time, I assumed this was a common approach, and was aware of the policy of 'write up' years. But as time progressed, the idea of 'writing up' seemed to run counter to my experience; grappling with the LR and methodology chapters, I found that only by writing was I able to arrive at my own conclusions so that I could take positions and occupy important parts of the territory. For me this was a crucial lesson, that 'writing down' is essential to the process of research, while 'writing up' is a term that can encourage unhelpful assumptions (Wellington, 2010).

Learning from the process

Doctoral researchers are advised not to rush into data collection, which could lead to adopting research designs without a clear theoretical grasp of research paradigms and methods. I confess

that at one point I seemed to have made precisely this mistake; only mid-way through my first phase of data collection did I begin to fully understand the methodological options open to me. As it happened, returning to the literature on methodology, I began to appreciate why I needed to clarify my position in terms of research paradigms and theories of how knowledge is created and understood (Waring, 2012). With great relief I discovered that I could legitimately adopt a flexible design to match the context of my study. From initially labouring under the impression that positivist research designs somehow had more validity, I came to realise that qualitative, interpretivist approaches were often more appropriate for studies of teaching and learning, given the many factors beyond the control of the researcher. Confidence in my methodological decisions was boosted by a BALEAP ResTES event on qualitative research, which allowed me to share ideas and to feel that I was not alone in my uncertainties and doubts. Looking back, it's easy to think I should have read more on methodology before starting the study, but learning about how to do doctoral research also has to take place during the process and cannot be complete at the outset.

I often warn my students of the problem of drowning in the data, that they may need to ruthlessly cut sections of analysis and results where they get in the way of the main argument. Unfortunately when faced with this problem, I was shocked at how difficult I found it to drop sections of text I had sweated over. At one point, finding a rare window for writing, I completed my final case studies, and submitting them to my annual advisory group, I believed that I had cracked the thesis. The subsequent meeting dashed these hopes; the case studies, it seemed, were too descriptive and did not allow me to foreground my arguments. Consigning the case descriptions to an appendix, I went back to work on a cross-case thematic chapter which would allow my arguments to come through. Writing the thesis is unlikely to be a smooth predictable process, but solutions to problems will usually present themselves.

Final thoughts

As a result of the first two years of research, I experimented with a new approach to formative feedback, using screencasts, which led to a separate piece of action research and two conference presentations in Summer 2011. I also worked on internal research that informed the design of a management specific pre-sessional, which led to a presentation at a BALEAP PIM in Spring 2012. On reflection, it was the doctoral research that gave me the confidence to do these things, and to see myself as a researcher.

It seems to me that the PhD expedition is never over, and submission and surviving the viva should not in itself mean reaching a summit. I'd like to be able to use the PhD as a base-camp to move higher in academic circles, to take on the challenge of becoming a supervisor myself. I hope to survive my viva and gain the PhD badge, but regardless of that outcome I feel the process I've gone through, though painful at times, has helped me to develop as a researcher and EAP professional.

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A journey of reflections: foundations for academic research

Chitra Varaprasad

See list of Chitra Varaprasad's publications and conference presentations in References at the end of this snapshot.

> Experience is not enough for reflective teaching, for we do not learn as much from experience alone as we learn from reflecting on that experience.
> (Farrell, 2008)

The often heard comment among teaching professionals is 'but where is the time to do research, bogged down as we are with curriculum demands, teaching and marking?'. Balancing teaching and research is no doubt challenging, but observing and reflecting on the teaching and learning situations in the classroom can provide the basis for research that is accessible to the teaching professional. What has kept me enthused about my work in my twenty-four years at the Centre for English Language and Communication (National University of Singapore) have been my constant reflections on teaching and learning that took place in the classroom. These have developed into classroom-based studies which, in their turn, formed the basis of conference presentations or research publications and sometimes both. These two outlets for sharing have helped to further reinforce these ideas within me and also to disseminate them to a wider professional community. The narrative below should help throw more light on the above.

Teaching in the early years
In my early teaching years I mainly taught Language Proficiency and Technical Communication courses. The former was heavily grammar-based and meant for students from the Science faculty, while the latter focused on writing of reports and oral presentation skills for Engineering students. However, my [unpublished] Master's dissertation, *Role of Rhetoric* (Varaprasad, 1988), and some of the ideas explored in it provided intellectual stimulation for pedagogical ideas that I wanted to explore. This dissertation explored the use of rhetorical relations for deconstructing expository texts. Based on the analysis, it also suggested and demonstrated procedures for teachers of English or writers of teaching materials to construct pedagogically useful questions for comprehension and composition. I knew I wanted to further this area of research, but I did not know how. Besides, the two courses I was teaching did not provide me with the opportunity to explore some of these ideas for pedagogical purposes. However, I sustained my interest by exploring some of the theoretical strands in my dissertation and their possible applications via publications and conference presentations (Varaprasad, 1998; 1997a; 1997b; 1997c; 1997d; 1996; 1995a; 1995b; 1995c; 1990), knowing full well that I would revisit them when occasion arose.

Moving on

The break to explore these ideas further came when I was assigned to teach an English for Academic Purposes module (EA1101) for undergraduates. The focus of this module was mainly on writing and language proficiency. Reflecting on the curriculum and the teaching and learning process in the classroom formed an integral part of my teaching.   At this juncture, I noticed a gap in the curriculum in that there was no focus on explicit teaching of reading strategies. I realised that this gap could be addressed by using some of the ideas I had explored in my publications for teaching reading and writing of expository texts (Varaprasad 1995a; 1994; 1993a; 1993b). The concept of using text analysis to deconstruct texts for their organization using rhetorical relations was one of them.

Armed with this new approach for analysing texts, I tried it out in the classroom for teaching reading. I must admit that initially I mainly focused on the effectiveness of this method. I continually observed what worked and what did not work in the classroom. If something did not work, I reflected on the why's and set out to improve my teaching methods. For example, I attempted initially to begin with a bottom-up approach, where I was focused on analysing relations between sentences and found this tedious for teaching purposes. I modified it to look at relations between paragraphs and found students were able to grasp the concept of analysing texts. I also realised that a top-down approach in my teaching was the way to go forward. To keep track of such reflections, I followed the practice of jotting down observations about what occurred in the classroom, including suggestions on how to address any issues that arose. It was not a diary that I maintained on a regular basis, but mainly a record of my thoughts and reflections as and when they emerged.

Further reading of literature introduced me to the Genre-specific Model of expository texts (Martin, 1989; Rothery, 1994; 1990) consisting of the three identifiable stages of expository texts: Thesis, Arguments and Conclusion. This schematic organisation provided the macrostructure for organization of expository texts and I decided to subsume within this macro frame the concepts of rhetorical relations representing inter- and intra-textual connections which I had incorporated earlier in my teaching method. These concepts formed the basis for analysing texts in my teaching approach.

I experienced a 'high' when I sensed my teaching approach worked and a 'low' when it did not. I was caught in a cycle of teaching and improving my teaching. As can be seen, my reflections at this point were mainly teacher or teaching-centred. Then the learning outcomes from my students emerged in the form of answers to questions I posed and in their assessment tasks. My 'highs' sunk lower and lower as I sensed a mismatch between my teaching and students' learning. What had been taught had not been caught. This resulted in the realization that teaching and learning are entwined and both need to be looked at in unison. Thus began my reflective journey of the teaching and learning process and its outcomes. This was also the time when my teaching philosophy and research orientation leaned towards a more learner- and learning-centred approach. In order to explore students' learning, I obtained pre- and post-training data, based on my training method. The data showed some positive outcomes. I also extended the concepts I used for teaching reading to filter into students' writing. For example the macro organization of expository texts, the inter- and intra-paragraph connections were concepts that students could relate to for writing their own expository texts. The concepts under 'reading for organisation' had relevance for how they organised their writing as well. I was

convinced that such a method would facilitate the integration of reading and writing in my teaching. This conviction enabled me to explore this particular strand in my teaching both before and during my doctoral research, resulting in presentations and publications (Varaprasad, 2008; 2007; 2003; 2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 2000; 1999).

The doctoral journey

Concurrently, feeling encouraged, I wanted to explore these experiments in the classroom for a full blown doctoral study. The module I was teaching (EA1101) provided me with the opportunity. I registered as a doctoral candidate in 1998. The most challenging years in my academic journey were 1998-2004. Translating my reflective thoughts and instincts into a highly structured and formal study at the same time as teaching full time, was no easy task.

I can still vividly remember going to the university library and looking at the beautifully bound navy blue theses on Applied Linguistics lined up along the shelves with their titles and names of authors etched in gold. I felt a sense of awe and was both impressed and overwhelmed as I looked at the bulky bound volumes. A casual conversation with a colleague made sense when she said 'don't look at the whole. Look at the Table of Contents and the individual chapters. You will find it manageable'. I drew a simple mind map covering some of the initial chapters and jotted down some of my ideas under each of them. It helped me to conceptualise some parts of my study. What motivated me throughout this journey was my conviction of the convergence of research and practice, which in turn was sustained by my constant reflections.

I must admit that at one point I felt I had reached a dead end in my research process. Concepts such as genre, discourse, semantic relations and rhetorical analysis from the literature kept floating in my head, each of them in isolation. I decided to take a break and send in my abstract, based on my work so far to a Genre conference in Oslo, Norway. My trip to Oslo to present my paper (Varaprasad, 2001c) provided the much needed direction. I set up a meeting with a 'genre expert'. A brief discussion with him at the conference and his suggestion that I design my own theoretical framework based on my so called 'floating ideas' seemed to provide me the moment of 'enlightenment' that I had been craving for. I worked on the framework and it provided the basis for the pedagogy I was looking for. Details of the framework and the teaching approach can be found in Varaprasad (2004).

The teaching approach I developed went through several modifications as I constantly reflected on the method and the learning outcomes. It focused on activating students' background knowledge about content and organization, followed by identifying the writer's thesis, the purpose of the writer at the level of the paragraphs and the connections between paragraphs, based on their purpose.

Generally used for teaching writing, the three phases of the Genre Teaching and Learning Cycle of Modelling, Joint Negotiation of Text and Independent Construction of Text (Flowerdew, 1993; Johns, 1997) formed the basis of the training to teach reading. It was modified to Teacher Modelling, Joint Analysis of Text and Independent Deconstruction of Text to reflect the reading focus. Teacher modelling, advocated by Janzen (2002) and Grabe (2002), was based on talking aloud and demonstrating strategy use. Secondly, the questioning strategy advocated by Nuttal (1996) and modelled by the teacher for raising students' awareness through the use of 'Wh' questions, provided the basis for training.

Training was modified in terms of the pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading phases (Urquhart & Weir, 1998). I coined the acronym SPORM (skim, purpose, organization, relation

and main idea) for clarity in application. As such, teacher modelling of the analysis of the first few paragraphs consisted of talking aloud through the questioning strategy using the acronym SPORM. This was followed by students' application of the strategy for the rest of the paragraphs in the text. The findings and outcomes of this study culminated in my doctoral thesis (Varaprasad, 2004).

Final reflections

I have taken you through my reflective journey and shown that classroom reflections can keep our teaching and learning interest alive. It is as much a learning process for us about our own teaching and students' learning. I must admit that the reflective process was not as linear as it sounds in writing. The ideas explored in conference presentations and in journals overlapped with my teaching phases across different modules, which I was assigned to teach subsequently. Teaching and learning concepts obtained while teaching one module, were further adapted while teaching another. In many ways, students' learning from my teaching has determined my own teaching and learning journey. Constantly reflecting on what occurs and what does not occur in the classroom has provided fodder for professional development that has enriched my teaching at CELC, NUS.

Opportunities to present at and to attend conferences was another aspect in my professional development that I benefitted from and made all the above possible. The academic ambience at these conferences provided uninterrupted time and space to reflect on ideas for further classroom-based research. However on return, some of them would soon dissipate because of lack of professional space for further reflections. The demands of administrative work or sometimes being assigned another module can also cause a disruption in the reflective process. However, a truly reflective teacher bounces back after some delay, albeit in a different classroom setting. What spurs her on is her own teaching and learning philosophy that has been shaped by her reflections in the past. The process continues and takes its own course, based on what challenges the classroom poses. My reflective journey continues….

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Conducting a BALEAP survey: setting up a doctoral support network

Sara Hannam

Unpublished survey to identify priorities for EAP doctoral support within BALEAP.

Reasons for the survey

When I joined the Research and Publications Subcommittee last year, one of my first responsibilities was to look into the profile and needs of people doing a doctorate in EAP and to find out what gaps exist in their doctoral experience. This was felt to be important for a number of reasons. It was anticipated there would be a lack of support networks and that the community of students doing an EAP related doctorate would be quite small and specialized. Additionally, this community is one BALEAP would like to extend more solid support towards as it is at the forefront of the EAP research agenda which is helping our profession continue to gain the academic credibility it deserves. It is by no means the only research community in EAP, but it is highly significant that it is rooted within academic research processes and institutions where doctoral students are based. As has often been stated, research driven teaching and learning should be a priority for any professional organization, along with investing in future generations of EAP research (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). Due to the position of EAP within academia, often straddling both academic discipline(s) and/or student services, the majority of EAP practitioners do not pursue a PhD as there is no immediate demand or incentive to do so, either from their department/unit or in terms of career improvement and progression. This does separate EAP from other academic disciplines where the expectation of a doctorate to secure an academic position is increasingly non-negotiable, particularly in the current climate of competition. It was felt important to explore this observation as I would like to do some further research in that specific area, thereby attempting to add a layer of critical enquiry to the overarching investigation (Benesch, 2009). This short research snapshot outlines the use of Survey Monkey to collect data on doctoral students on behalf of BALEAP.

Setting up the survey

To begin with, a list of potential informants was compiled. I carried out an extensive trawl of various e-lists to locate those who were either currently doing EAP PhDs or who had done them since 2000 and compiled an Excel file with names, contact details, topic of PhD and point in the

process where the student was. This included BALEAP, IATEFL, BAAL and EATAW. This process was considerably more painstaking than predicted as there are a variety of universities both in the UK and abroad who are supervising just a handful or less of PhD level students. Beyond the larger institutions, it is not easy to locate this information via, for example, a visit to the university website which meant using e-lists to locate individual students was required. The message sent made it clear that the widest definition of EAP was being used and areas that incorporate both the investigation of language forms and communities of practice should be included – both quantitative and qualitative work was welcomed including that with an interdisciplinary remit. In response to the emails I sent to e-lists, I received information both from PhD students directly and about PhD students (sent by supervisors or other individuals at their home university) which trickled in at a slow pace over a four-month period.

I also sent emails to personal contacts in other Anglophone countries (Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA) to ensure that the net was wider than simply the UK (although this needs further expanding). Additionally, I searched the database at the British Library (http://ethos.bl.uk/Home.do, date visited December 2012-January 2013) for completed EAP doctorates. In total I compiled a sample of 35 PhDs in progress and 30 completed PhDs related to EAP. I then had to locate contact details for all the individuals concerned as some obtained via supervisors or EThOS were not complete. I was able to successfully locate contact details for 97% of the sample group. This process is in no way exhaustive and will continue to be added to, but was the limit of what could be achieved within the five-month time frame.

After gathering contact details I set up a survey using Survey Monkey. I reviewed the content with members of the Research and Publications Subcommittee and conducted a pilot with two trusted colleagues. I then invited those identified in the Excel file directly to participate in the survey via email. The survey was a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions and provided extensive space for comments, most of which was taken up by respondents who seemed keen to talk about their experiences. A reminder email was sent one month later and the final completion rate stood at 25 respondents (15 completed and 10 in progress PhDs) out of an original sample of 65. The data provided will be further discussed at the BALEAP Conference (April 2013) in an open event which aims to drill down further and confirm some of the provisional findings with an audience containing some PhD students who did not take the survey. Additionally a PhD student volunteer (Constantine Dimitriou) has recently joined the Research and Publications Subcommittee with a view to making sure the student voice in the EAP PhD process is clearly represented on a continuing basis.

Survey Monkey

Survey Monkey as a tool for carrying out web-based surveys has attracted criticism and acclaim in equal measure. Those who feel it is deficient tend to focus on the fact it is widely used in market research and other commercially driven data collection and is therefore not suited to more academic research. Other criticisms may focus on the limitations of web surveys per se as a single form of data collection or prioritise paper versions. It may be felt web surveys are only able to capture those who are active in e-forums (see Solomon, 2001). However, all research tools have their limitations and web based surveys have become significantly more sophisticated over the last decade (see Evans et al., 2005). The easiest way of ensuring the robustness of the data is to utilize web surveys as *one tool amongst many* and in order to gain a preliminary insight into a particular area of research. As a word of caution, if the research being carried out is subject to

ethical constraints, careful investigation of the appropriacy of a web-based tool would be needed (see Buchanan, 2010). For this kind of research which aimed at providing a snapshot of what hurdles a typical PhD student might be facing, I felt that Survey Monkey was an appropriate choice as it is able to capture an overview of a situation in an efficient manner.

Those who have used Survey Monkey in academic research are often surprised by how easy it is to set up and the high quality of data processing which is possible. The free basic version does not afford much of the above and is limited to 10 questions – it is useful for a pilot run of a small project but the researcher can only see the analysis on screen and cannot download charts or other visuals. The 'unlimited' version is more than sufficient for a very good level of analysis and offers features such as filtering, download of various tables and charts and question randomization. Unfortunately this version is no longer available from Survey Monkey. The platinum and gold versions are more advanced and offer enhancements like phone support and personalization of appearance through adding of logos – full features can be found at www.surveymonkey.com (date accessed April 2013).

Key findings

There are a number of key findings worth mentioning at this stage which will be followed up in future discussions and further research.

- Responses were received from PhD students located in England, Scotland, Belgium, Australia, China and Norway. This is a step in the right direction regarding capturing a picture that extends beyond the UK and supports the BALEAP goal of becoming a global forum for EAP professionals.
- Most were attached to UK institutions with a minority being at Australian universities. More work is needed to investigate other Anglophone and non-Anglophone settings where EAP is increasingly taking place.
- The majority of people who responded did/are doing their PhD whilst working (15 full time, 8 part time). Only two are focusing exclusively on their doctorate and one respondent is doing so as she has been on successive maternity leave having had three children during the course of her part-time doctorate. These findings are worthy of additional research in relation to the kind of pressure experienced by contemporary PhD students.
- Most who work are involved in areas connected with education. 100% expect their PhD to enhance their career prospects. I would like to do a follow up study, separate from the BALEAP Doctoral network, to ascertain if a PhD does in fact enhance career opportunities in EAP related fields.
- 40.9% of PhD students are self-funded, 22.7% have a scholarship (often only fees) and 36.4% are funded by their workplace. A deeper analysis of these findings will enable a better grasp of what kind of funding individuals get from their workplaces and will form part of the follow up research plan, mentioned in the previous point. BALEAP is not, at present, able to offer direct funding and help for PhD students but could certainly act as an information source on such opportunities where they exist as part of the student network.
- 60.9% are members of BALEAP. Some are members of other organisations such as IATEFL, BAAL, TESOL and EATAW. It is hoped that BALEAP may increase PhD student membership as part of this initiative which aims to offer some immediate and direct benefits.

- Qualitative comments identify the three biggest hurdles as: time management (especially when the student has family obligations), lack of allowance at work for PhD studies and isolation from a community of PhD students.
- Qualitative comments identify the two biggest high points as: breaking through and understanding difficult concepts and having the space to think about topics in depth.

To illustrate how the visuals on Survey Monkey work, Fig1 displays responses to one multiple choice question (*What kind of support would help you with your doctoral studies?*), which had a series of options for the participant to choose from. Participants could respond to as many suggestions as they wished. The two highest responses which included the majority across both those who had completed and who are currently doing their doctorate relate to a) the need for a community of PhD students and b) access to critical friends beyond the PhD supervisor. This was also confirmed in a specific question about critical friends, to which 73.9% replied they do not have access to colleagues to comment on their work beyond their supervisor. Presentation and publication opportunities also feature strongly as do access to specialist help with a particular area of the doctoral work. These are all areas that BALEAP can actively contribute to with current resources available.
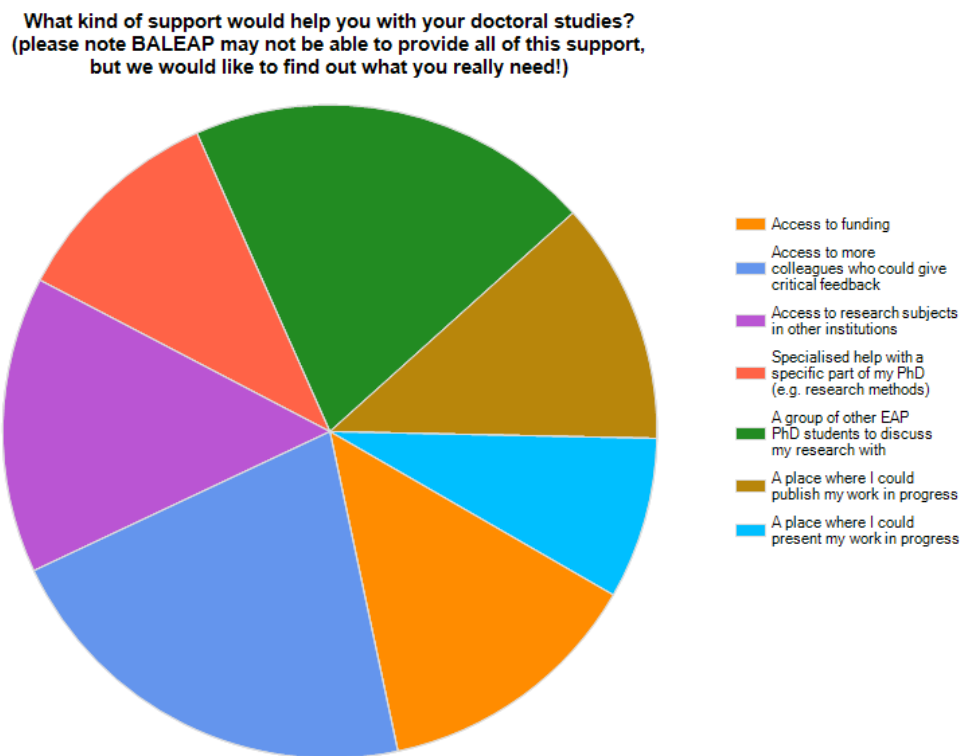

Fig1: an example of visual from Survey Monkey

Future developments
The areas of support that seem worthy of further investigation in the session at the 2013 BALEAP Conference (with a view to putting them into action in the short term) are:

- Developing a critical friend network of post-PhD colleagues from BALEAP and beyond for students to obtain feedback beyond their supervisor. This could also include the specialist help alluded to above. This network could be arranged in short targeted one-off sessions, utilize virtual as well as face to face communication potential and would be dependent on specific expertise that could be offered by the critical friend beyond the supervisory relationship. This would help to avoid confusion, particularly in the early stages of the work. Naturally this would rely on volunteers from the academic community, so caucusing interest and uptake is the next step. An initial informal email survey amongst four post-PhD colleagues suggests that this is thought of as a good idea, but would need to be time limited and targeted as many are full-time supervisors in their university role.

- Developing a stronger and more robust community of PhD students in BALEAP who can share research experience and which may include presentation and publication opportunities. Areas that can be exploited here are specialized BALEAP events or sections of events, publications for PhD research in progress and an online dedicated community to explore shared interest. This area will move forward simultaneously and will hopefully enable PhD students to have their own distinctive voice and identity within BALEAP.

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This edited collection contains contributions from a number of presenters and participants at BALEAP ResTES events.