

Conference Report

BALEAP PIM: Process and Practice in EAP - University of Sheffield English Language Teaching Centre, 14 November 2015

Gary Riley-Jones

Goldsmiths, University of London

The highly successful BALEAP PIM recently hosted at the University of Sheffield English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) was entitled ‘Process and Practice in EAP’, with the conference themes divided into five strands: systems for feedback; frameworks for tasks; procedures for assessment; process approach; and autonomy and reflection. In addition to the sessions based around these themes, there were also three plenaries presented by Zoltán Dörnyei, David Hyatt and Diane Schmitt.

The conference began with Zoltán Dörnyei’s opening plenary on ‘Long-term Motivation and Motivational Currents in L2 Learning’. In his presentation, Prof. Dörnyei introduced the concept of ‘Directed Motivational Current’ (DMC) referring ‘to an intense motivational drive capable of both stimulating and supporting long-term behaviour, such as learning a foreign/second language’. DMCs, Prof. Dörnyei argued, involve an intense motivational surge where individuals ‘pursue a goal/vision which is considered personally significant, highly relevant to one’s desired identity and emotionally satisfying’. He also argued that DMCs ‘have been used to transform individuals, groups and situations’ to allow them to ‘move on to new levels of existence or operation’ and that as such they have considerable potential to motivate learners in the language classroom. In practical terms, Prof. Dörnyei stressed the importance of group work and project frameworks that can ultimately ‘generate DMC-like sustained motivational currents in L2 classrooms’. His latest book *Motivational Currents in Language Learning: Frameworks for Focused Interventions* was published in September 2015.

Following Prof. Dörnyei’s plenary, I attended two sessions on e-portfolios: Alison Evans’ ‘The Evolution of a Reflective Portfolio Assessment’, and Nick Murgatroyd’s ‘Designing and Implementing an e-portfolio for Pre-Sessional Students’. Alison Evans presented an interesting and thoughtful session on the process of introducing a Reflective

Portfolio as part of the International Pre-Master's course at UCL. She discussed the questions that need to be addressed in e-portfolio assessment, with particular reference to the work of Rogers (2001). During this presentation, two key points that came out for me were her belief that the chief advantage of e-portfolios is that they allow students to show engagement with the process of reflection, and that they could probably not be used on pre-sessionals due to the intensive nature of such courses.

Interestingly, in the light of Alison Evans' comments with regard to e-portfolios and pre-sessionals, Nick Murgatroyd's presentation dealt specifically with the difficulties of implementing an e-portfolio process on a 6-week pre-sessional at Sheffield ELTC. He discussed the various software options and how the ELTC finally came to design its own e-portfolio tool using Google Classroom and other GAFE products, and went on to talk about how such a tool met pedagogical and assessment demands.

There then followed the second plenary given by David Hyatt, Director of the Doctorate in Education at the School of Education at Sheffield. His potentially controversial talk, entitled 'Reconceptualising EAP as Academic Repertoire', focused on the often-stated trivialisation and marginalisation of EAP within the university. He asked the audience to consider a recharacterisation of 'our professional practice more explicitly away from the simple language upskilling of students and more towards the preparation of potential and actual HE students to become successful members of the academic community'. This, he argued, could be achieved in a consideration of what Blommaert and Backus (2011) refer to as 'repertoire', i.e., focusing more on the role of the EAP tutor 'as developers of the repertoires of successful students'. He went on to argue that 'In making the case for the trans-disciplinary, culturally-agile and research-informed work we do with students', EAP can be considered 'as professionally important as other university departments'.

In the afternoon I attended Elizabeth Long's presentation on 'Learning Presentation Skills through Peer Feedback', in which she demonstrated how all first-year students on the Richmond University Transition programme are encouraged to give and receive peer feedback on one another's presentations. She concluded that student feedback on this approach had been very positive and that teachers had noticed an increase in both skills development and motivation.

In her presentation on ‘Formative Feedback on Academic Writing’, Lisa Robinson, an EAP tutor at Nottingham University, presented the findings of a small-scale action research project that explored students’ perceptions of formative feedback. She discovered a mixture of student preferences for both direct feedback, and what she referred to as ‘fluffy’ feedback and commented on student responses to different types of feedback. This was a very interesting session.

Lisa Robinson’s talk was followed by an equally interesting session by Sal Consoli from the University of the West of England, who presented on a similar theme, ‘Written Feedback: Does it Work?’ Reporting on the findings of a study he had conducted into students’ perceptions of and attitudes to feedback on their written EAP assignments, he discovered that although students’ perceptions of their understanding of feedback were highly positive, this attitude did not necessarily reflect an accurate understanding of the feedback given. His other conclusions noted the need for clarity in tutor feedback; that students’ understanding of key concepts was not always clear, e.g., the difference between cohesion and coherence; and that feedback needs to be specific and ideally provided with examples of problems/errors.

The closing plenary of the day was given by Diane Schmitt, from Nottingham Trent University and Chair of BALEAP, who spoke on ‘Applying Linguistics and Theorising Practice in EAP’. Touching upon the theme brought up earlier by David Hyatt, Diane Schmitt discussed the relationship between scholarly activity in EAP and teacher research, through exploring the theory-to-practice cycle in Applied Linguistics research. She contended that this cycle is incomplete in EAP as ‘we rarely see how the practice of EAP feeds back into EAP theory’. Referring to the work of Ursula Wingate, Diane Schmitt argued that action research, popular within EAP, must refrain from remaining local and argued how such research had the potential for ‘going wider’ through a closing of the loop in the theory and practice cycle.

Many of these themes I am sure will be touched upon at the St Andrews EAP Conference on ‘Finding the Balance: Language and Content in EAP’ on 27 February 2016 and at the BALEAP PIM on In-Sessional EAP at the LSE on 19 March 2016.

Videos of the plenary speakers from the Sheffield BALEAP PIM can be found at:
<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/eltc/events/baleap>

A Storify of some of the highlights of the PIM are also available at:

<https://storify.com/baleap/baleap-pim-at-eltc-sheffield-university-14-novembe>

Twitter users can follow the Sheffield ELTC's dedicated PIM account [@BALEAppimELTC](https://twitter.com/BALEAppimELTC) and use the [#BALEAppimELTC](https://twitter.com/BALEAppimELTC) hashtag to view ideas and comments that were shared throughout the day.

CONTACT THE AUTHOR

G.Riley-Jones@gold.ac.uk