The role of the teacher in scripting authenticity into EAP materials

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Authentic texts or authentic experiences?

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Overview

- Authenticity
- Understanding expertise
- EAP teacher mediation of under-represented genres
  - Ephemeral genres
  - Forbidden genres
  - Occluded genres
- EAP teacher mediation of the barrage of pressures from
  - Source material
  - Supervisor comments
  - Conflicting advice

Authenticity

'An *authentic text* is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort' (Gilmore, 2007: 98).

'Authenticity… is a function of the interaction between reader/hearer and the text which incorporates the intentions of the writer/speaker.' (Widdowson, 1979: 165)

'The authenticity or reality of language use in its normal pragmatic functioning depends on its being localised within a particular discourse community.' (Widdowson, 1998: 711)

Authenticity

Authenticity depends on

- the source of the discourse

- the context of its production (Gilmore, 2007: 98)

- shared knowledge of pragmatic and rhetorical conventions by members of the community (Widdowson, 1979)

- students cannot authenticate texts because they have not yet joined the community.

- Teachers have to mediate text and task authenticity.

Authenticity

Authenticity of outcome is achieved when students

- understand the conventions of the community of users

- can align their performance with that of the community

- can continue to develop their understanding by exposure to community practices

'…an uncritical acceptance of the need to present learners with "authentic" data can lead to an avoidance of pedagogical responsibility.' (Widdowson, 1979: 171)

The EAP Teacher

EAP teachers take on pedagogical responsibility by making the academic community a tangible presence in the classroom:

- teaching academic performance as well as language

- mediating the target texts and tasks and the expectations of lecturers in the target community

- using academic criteria to assess the extent to which students' performance aligns with academic expectations

- making students aware of future challenges & problems and the options they have for dealing with these.

The EAP Teacher

'…combined needs assessor, specialized syllabus designer, authentic materials developer, and content-knowledgeable instructor, capable of coping with the revolving door of content areas relevant to learners' communities' (Belcher, 2006: 139).

Available online at http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/media/london-metropolitan-university/london-met-photos/professional-service-departments-photos/marketing-alumni-and-uk-recruitment/marketing/course-slideshow-images/UGstudent_shoot_2013_1005flipped-600x349.jpg

By playing this wide range of roles, the EAP teacher develops expertise.

Expertise in teaching

Research contrasts novice & experienced with experts who

- develop deep & integrated knowledge of academic language and performance and how to teach this

- seek to renew practical classroom knowledge through interaction with theoretical knowledge

- use routines to perform effortlessly & efficiently

- use freed up resources to tackle more difficult problems

- 'work at the edge of their competence'

(Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993: 34) (Tsui, 2003)

The Philosophy of Expertise

Classification of expertise (Collins & Evans, 2007)

- Ubiquitous expertise – e.g. natural language speaking, tacit knowledge necessary to live in society.

- Beer-mat expertise – knowledge to win pub quizzes

- Contributory expertise – sufficient knowledge of a specialist domain to contribute, e.g. to do research

- Interactional expertise – ability to discuss contribution

- Interactional expertise – ability to talk to contributory experts about key concepts, research approaches and the way knowledge is advanced without being able to contribute themselves.

Interactional expertise

Interactional expertise – knowledge of the language, key concepts, research approaches of a specialist domain and without having contributory competence.

- Administrative staff can discuss courses, programmes and research without themselves being able to teach or do research in the specialist domain.

- Translators or journalists make specialist domains accessible to other language speakers or educated non-specialists, e.g. *New Scientist*, *The Economist*.

- EAP teachers develop interactional expertise.

Interactional expertise

Interactional expertise enables EAP teachers to make the academic community a tangible presence in the classroom by

- mediating the target texts and tasks and the expectations of lecturers in target community

- making students aware of future challenges and options they have for dealing with these

- supporting students to align their performance with that of the community

- identifying and exploiting under-represented genres: ephemeral genres, forbidden genres, occluded genres, & using these to teach language & pragmatic competence.

Under-represented Genres

- We will present some of the under-represented genres we included in *Access EAP: Frameworks*

- These can be used to help students align themselves to the expectations of the university and to study the language they need to succeed there.
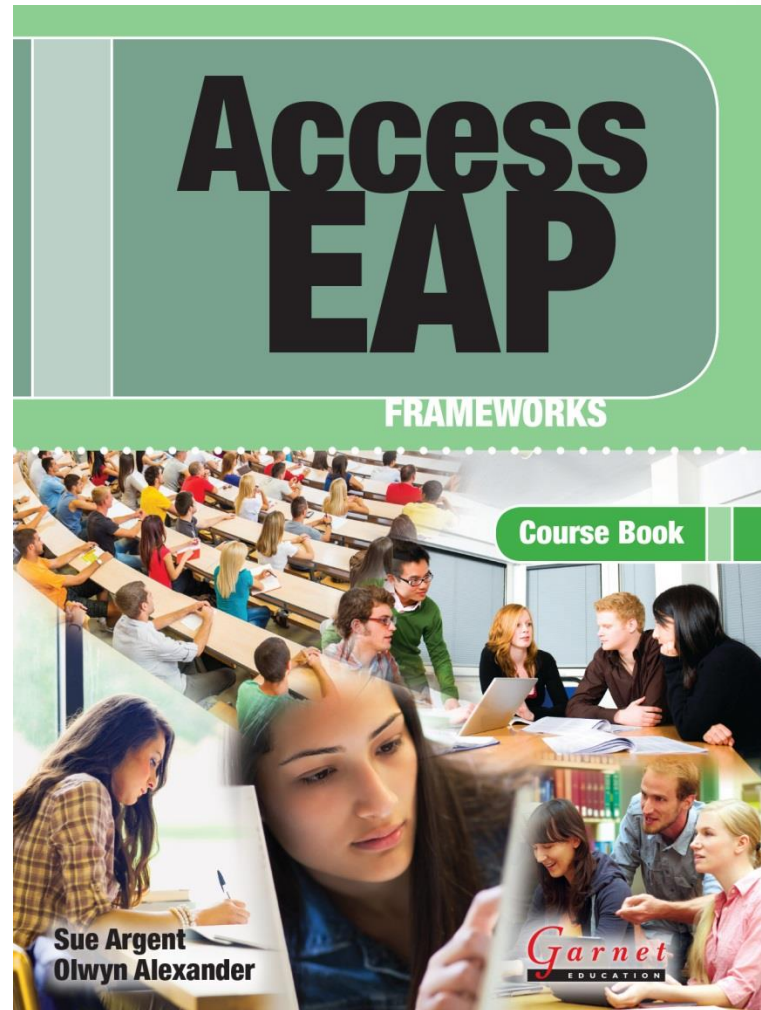
Ephemeral genres

- 'Critical incidents' (Tsui, 2003: 430)
  emerging from student interactions with each other and the university, usually without being officially recorded

- especially valuable to capture when such interactions are problematic

- mined to reveal key aspects of context, behaviour and language

- a potential springboard for students to explore their own performance in an academic setting

Ephemeral genres

Context

Sofia – a postgraduate student – found herself struggling to follow lectures and produce coursework in her first term of an engineering course. She knew that her problem was English. Her supervisor gave her the name of the EAP teacher who ran in-sessional EAP courses. Sofia went straight to the EAP teacher's office, where she found her surrounded by piles of exam scripts.

Student discussion:

What would you do or say? Why?

Ephemeral genres

Sofia actually said:

I am a student from [country]. I would like to tell you about my situation so that you can give me some advice.

How appropriate was this?

Sofia was upset because the teacher seemed angry and abrupt. So she came away feeling confused about what the teacher had said and not sure what to do next.

What would <u>you</u> do next?

She went back to her supervisor who advised her to email the EAP teacher

Write the email that Sophia should write.

Forbidden genres

- Genres students have access to but which are not valued by the academic community, e.g. Cheat websites,

- BALEAP discussion in January revealed that Cheat websites are an unfamiliar genre to EAP colleagues but probably quite familiar to students.

- Is it appropriate to exploit such a genre?

- What would you do?

Forbidden genres

- Pastiche of a cheat website compiled from examples on the web

- Students answer sceptical questions about audience and purpose

- Compare home page with 'fine print' buried deep in the site.

- Decide if appropriate to use this service.

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Forbidden genres

Discussing a forbidden genre such as a cheat website

- shows students that teachers are aware of these sites

- enables students to develop critical evaluation skills as they ask sceptical questions about the 'service'

- contextualises plagiarism as an aspect of intellectual integrity, using the work of others in an ethical way

- leads on to the consequences of using this 'service' – an academic misconduct hearing.

Occluded genres

Academic occluded genres are, in part, those which support the research publication process but are not themselves part of the research record (Swales, 1996).

The notion of occlusion is extended here to refer to the *features* of academic texts which are not ordinarily visible to the reader (Pecorari, 2006).

Examples: submission letters; peer reviews of research articles submitted to journals; the relationship between a reference to a source and the source itself, e.g. reading logs.

Occluded genres

A focus group discussion

- academic supervisors discuss approaches to research

- originally four separate discipline-specific groups

- scripted into a mixed-discipline discussion

- creates a shorter more focused listening

- captures similarities in approaches to research across disciplines and language to talk about research

- enables students to listen in to evaluative discussions

Authentic texts or authentic experiences?

- How can we use authentic materials to replicate the authentic experiences and pressures that led to their creation?

- Practical issues:

- First catch your materials!

- Decide how they are to be used

First catch your materials!

- Have a system for capturing the knowledge we encounter in our teaching and interaction with the academic system. Store on the shared drive to use in pre-sessional and teacher development.

  Examples:

- Pre-sessional teachers log useful comments and examples of supervisor feedback from their students.

- Screenshots of Moodle discussions about how to approach and assignment on course websites

- Long genres- can be consulted on the university repository e.g. for typical structure of a PhD. (to IMRAD or not to IMRAD?)

Deciding how to use authentic materials

- Are we going to focus on generic aspects or discipline- or course-specific contexts?

- Are we going to present them 'raw' or adapted?

- Are we going to use them with a purely contextual focus or can we also exploit them for language study?

Summary

- Students cannot authenticate texts if they have not yet fully joined their academic community.

- EAP teachers have a responsibility to make the academic community a tangible presence in the classroom by mediating text and task authenticity for their students.

- In doing this they develop interactional expertise – the ability to talk to contributory experts about key concepts, research approaches and the way knowledge is advanced in particular disciplines.

- Interactional expertise puts teachers in a position to notice & exploit under-represented genres, which can help students align themselves to the expectations of the university and to acquire the language they need to succeed there.

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