The EAP Practitioner as Researcher and Disseminator of Knowledge
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Introduction

Two well-known articles debate the merits and demerits of the general/specific argument in EAP: Spack's 1998 article, 'Initiating ESL students into the academic discourse community: how far should we go?' and Hyland's 2002 rejoinder, 'Specificity revisited: How far should we go now?'. These two pieces are often seen as flag-bearers for two different approaches to EAP: EGAP (English for general academic purposes) and ESAP (English for specific academic purposes). Spack expressed a preference for teaching EGAP and transferable academic writing skills such as the ability to write from sources and to argue effectively, which would benefit all EAP students; whereas Hyland drew on corpus-based research which underlines disciplinary differences in academic discourse and concluded that we should go as far as we can towards teaching an EAP which is tailored to our students' academic communities and the requirements of these communities. The relevance of Spack and Hyland's articles to this paper is that both have profound implications for the role of the EAP teacher, the knowledge base the teacher should be constructing, and the type of work the EAP teacher does to disseminate this knowledge in and out of the classroom. Turning to the literature seeking to demarcate the EAP teacher's role, we see that Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) speak of a knowledgeable professional and practitioner who performs five key roles:

- Teacher
- Course designer and materials provider
- Collaborator
- Researcher
- Evaluator (p.16)

Similarly, Hyland and Shaw (2016) describe a wide range of roles and responsibilities associated with the EAP practitioner. They claim that one of the four main principles of EAP is what they call groundedness, 'A commitment to link pedagogy and research. A research base underlies materials and instructional practices.' (p.3), and so, as with Dudley-Evans and St John, the connection between the EAP practitioner and EAP research is evident:

> …the groundedness of EAP has…meant that teachers…do not just read the research, but are actively involved in creating it. […] By understanding the genres we teach and the students we work with, our research feeds back into the design of curricula, courses, materials and tasks.' (p.3)

In line with Hyland and Shaw, I argue that EAP knowledge is not the sole property of any one party; that EAP practitioners, in addition to EAP researchers, textbook writers, and content lecturers, all have their part to play in the construction of this knowledge (in addition to EAP students, who can carry out investigations of target discourses themselves). Some may ask why EAP practitioners need to be involved in research and in creating knowledge: can't the research be left to full-time researchers? But EAP practitioners are in a position to contribute to our stock of knowledge in a way that researchers and textbook writers are not. Practitioners have a more vivid sense of research priorities and pressing problems and questions that need addressing, as manifested in their day-to-day routines and conversations with students, colleagues, and content lecturers. EAP practitioners then, have a part to play in

knowledge production and in driving the discipline forward, and below I say more about when and how practitioners can acquire and disseminate this knowledge.

Two scenarios to demonstrate the need for EAP practitioner knowledge
I want to look at two scenarios in which EAP practitioners may find themselves that speak to the need for the EAP practitioner to add to the store of the discipline's knowledge. In both cases my argument is that EAP practitioner knowledge has a local, institution-specific flavour that the other actors I will be referring to—EAP researchers and EAP textbook writers—cannot access.

Scenario 1: The EAP practitioner requires teaching materials addressing content lecturers' writing requirements
During pre-sessionals and in-sessionals, EAP practitioners will commonly wish to have their students write essays and other types of texts which attempt to resemble the actual writing assignments the students' content lecturers set. And thanks to recent research, the EAP practitioner is in a better informed position than ever regarding what kind of writing lecturers may require. For instance, based on an analysis of 200 modules across the disciplinary spectrum at a US university, Cooper & Bikowski (2007) described writing requirements by means of a taxonomy of ten writing tasks; while Nesi & Gardner (2012) identified 13 genre families of student writing using the UK BAWE Corpus. Among the genres identified in these two studies are essays, book reviews, abstracts, reports, case studies, literature surveys, and empathy writing; and we also get a sense of the relative frequencies with which they are assigned across the disciplines. For EAP practitioners wondering what kind of writing to assign to their pre- or in-sessional students, then, this research provides an excellent start. But there are immediately two questions:

> (i) If the EAP practitioner is using (or is obliged to use) a textbook, are the writing genres which the textbook author decided to include in the book the ones empirical investigations like those by Cooper and Bikowski and Nesi and Gardner say are most common—or rather the genres the textbook author rightly or wrongly *believes* to be the most useful and popularly assigned? (Or even, conceivably, genres the publishers required the textbook writer to include for reasons of their own?) It may be that the genres featured in the materials do not align with those that the students require.

> (ii) Even if the textbook *does* contain what the research suggests are the target genres, is the textbook material alone sufficient to meet students' needs? This is unlikely; there will be local variations at the level of institution, department, and lecturer with regard to writing requirements—variations in the types of writing genres assigned and in expectations associated with the writing in each genre. Corpus-based research tells us that writing varies from discipline to discipline (e.g., Hyland 2000); but ethnographically oriented research also tells us that lecturers' requirements for student writers can vary within the same discipline, and that different lecturers within the same department may want different things, in terms of the genre, structure, and form of the writing (cf. Lea & Stierer 2000; Lea & Street 2000).

The EAP practitioner and his/her knowledge can address both these problems. Cognisant of the research by Cooper and Bikowski and Nesi and Gardner, the practitioner can conduct a preliminary evaluation of the textbook and the suitability of

the writing genres it includes. Then an ethnographically-oriented project which involves some or all of the following will enable the EAP practitioner to adapt and supplement the textbook materials and tailor them to meet local needs:

(i) an analysis of departments' writing tasks;

(ii) formal or informal conversations with lecturers in a department who are responsible for setting these essay tasks to demystify what exactly is required;

(iii) analysis of exemplary and poor student texts addressing these tasks in terms of content, organization, linguistic and rhetorical features;

(iv) analysis of markers' feedback on the texts analysed in (iii);

(iv) markers' explanations of the feedback analysed in (iv) during interview; and

(v) where lecturers devote part of a lecture or seminar to explaining the writing assignments and what they require, observations of these lectures/seminars in order to further enhance the EAP practitioner's understanding of requirements.

So local investigations regarding these requirements are needed—investigations by a locally-based EAP practitioner which will ultimately result in an understanding of specific, even idiosyncratic conditions on the ground which neither a textbook writer nor a corpus-based analyst can provide. These investigations by the EAP practitioner will bear fruit in the form of appropriate teaching materials s/he will create to meet the students' needs—that is, a local form of knowledge. But the EAP practitioner should not stop there; s/he should disseminate these findings and share the resultant teaching materials at conferences, in journals, and via other outlets, such as blogs, thereby adding to the research community's store of knowledge. This will take the EAP practitioner's knowledge beyond a limited form of 'service' knowledge which meets only the most immediate needs of a particular class and will enable this knowledge to reach a wider audience. It will then be evaluated and utilized by the wider EAP community, and enhance other EAP practitioners' knowledge bases, demonstrating to them how they might conduct research and author teaching materials of their own.

Scenario 2: The EAP practitioner is regularly asked by students to 'proofread' their essays

My second example focuses on university student writers' requests for proofreading. Writers may approach a number of different parties seeking 'proofreading': fellow students on their programmes who they believe to be good writers (sometimes because of their L1 English status), fellow L2 friends, 'professional' proofreaders, or EAP practitioners. Indeed, one hears about EAP practitioners being approached regularly with requests for proofreading; and also of how students may seek proofreading out in writing centres and during one-to-one writing tutorials offered by EAP units (despite the fact that such writing services may explicitly state that proofreading is beyond their remit). Furthermore, it is significant that in many UK universities proofreading is unregulated, meaning anyone can offer their services as a proofreader, and a walk around campus is a walk past proofreading adverts pasted around the walls ('Do you need help with your English? Proofreading and editing services. I am a native speaker proofreader. Quick turnaround.'). Several questions arise: What is being offered in the name of proofreading? To what extent does the reality of what is being offered align with lecturers' and university managers' beliefs

about what is available? Are lecturers and their institutions comfortable with proofreading being accessible and the 'help' writers are provided with? If not, why not? How much of a consensus is there around these questions amongst staff and students? Truly, as our students sometimes say, a 'hot topic'.

And yet how much research does one see in the EAP literature on student proofreading? Very little, with a few exceptions, such as work by Joan Turner (2011, 2012, 2013, 2015) and work I did with colleagues a few years ago (Harwood et al 2009, 2010, 2012). A much more popular focus for research in the EAP literature is the editing and proofreading of L2 researchers' writing for publication, as opposed to the proofreading of work by undergraduate and master's L2 writers (e.g., Burrough-Boenisch 2003; Lillis & Curry 2006; Willey & Tanimoto 2012, 2013, 2015). Focusing on L2 scholars writing for publication is, of course, an important and intriguing topic, particularly as universities in peripheral contexts increasingly require researchers to publish in international English-medium ISI-indexed journals to secure their positions or get promoted. However, for EAP practitioners who are mostly working with L2 writers on undergraduate or master's level programmes, it is a focus that is less likely to be relevant. It would appear then that apart from the odd study, EAP research is not addressing a pertinent issue for practitioners.

And so again my argument here is that EAP practitioners have an important role to play in developing and disseminating knowledge. Since they are approached by students requiring editing and proofreading, EAP practitioners will gain insights into students' understandings and expectations of proofreading and what it constitutes. Furthermore, EAP practitioners may find that some students' understandings and expectations of proofreading may have little in common with their own. (Indeed, in my own research interviews with EAP practitioners, I have heard stories of how students requested ghostwriting rather than proofreading) But whatever student writers may or may not require of proofreaders, as with scenario 1, the EAP practitioner is in a unique position to gain access to these student writers compared to other researchers. Furthermore, if their EAP unit offers a writing centre or one-to-one consultation service, practitioners would be able to question students about their evaluation of such services and whether and to what extent the help aligns with the type of help students would wish for. Practitioners would be able to conduct 'talk around text' interviews (see Lillis 2008), during which student writers could refer to samples of their writing which writing tutors had already helped with to make their beliefs and wishes plain.

Why has there been so little research on proofreading to date by applied linguists? Perhaps those EAP researchers who are no longer (or never have been) EAP practitioners themselves don't appreciate the need for urgent investigation of this issue? Perhaps the topic makes some feel uncomfortable, suspecting that it will uncover stories of academic dishonesty and lead to even more unsavoury headlines in the press about 'needy' and 'illiterate' student writers? My own investigations have uncovered evidence of proofreaders having differing understandings of what is entailed by 'proofreading' and intervening in texts in very different ways, with some 'proofreaders' helping to rewrite students' texts at the level of content, reorganizing texts and enhancing the writer's arguments. Further, I have heard accounts of proofreaders being asked by students to ghostwrite, and of occasionally being defrauded by writers who refused to pay them post-proofreading. Proofreading is

perhaps an issue that many university policy makers would prefer to be left unresearched. But it seems to me ripe for investigation, and one that EAP practitioners are well situated to explore. If proofreading is indeed an issue EAP units grapple with and which is not being investigated in the literature, EAP practitioners can plug the gap and thereby can help ensure EAP research is more relevant to its audience.

Conclusion
In line with Dudley-Evans and St John and Hyland and Shaw, I argue that the EAP practitioner inhabits a number of roles, including that of the researcher and disseminator of this research, thereby acting as a disseminator of knowledge. But some may find these arguments unrealistic in today's marketized UK HE sector, characterized by increasing workloads and budgetary constraints; and with EAP practitioners and units in many institutions struggling against being seen as low status 'service providers'. The kind of research I envisage for EAP practitioners is undeniably time consuming and would compete with the many other demands made on them; while EAP practitioners should fulfil the roles of researcher and knowledge disseminator, these are not of course their *only* roles. And so small spaces of time would need to be carved out to undertake these investigations over perhaps a period of years. But however long such research takes, far better to make gradual progress in our understanding of what students and lecturers require than be content with attempting to straightforwardly transmit what textbooks teach, regardless of the suitability of such materials and their fit with local conditions (scenario 1); or to wait in vain for the EAP literature to address a problematic current issue (scenario 2).

EAP practitioners, then, can and should be driving the research agenda. They know what they and their students need in a way EAP researchers who have little or no contact with EAP classrooms do not. They can find out more about these needs by conducting local investigations. They can pinpoint and address shortcomings and a lack of relevance in EAP textbooks. They can appreciate the disconnect between their own needs and the focus and preoccupations of the EAP literature and strive to reduce this disconnect. And they can disseminate this knowledge to the wider EAP community. EAP teachers are uniquely placed to enhance the direction and quality of EAP research going forward.

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