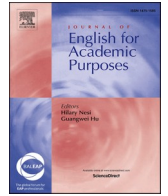




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EAP teacher observation: Developing criteria and identifying the forms of pedagogic practice they afford

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ABSTRACT

Here we critically revisit a scheme for EAP teacher observation and development, created in response to particular challenges in a UK pre-sessional context. The scheme was closely informed by the BALEAP Competency Framework for Teachers of EAP (CFTEAP). Our view that observation criteria should reflect broader course principles – and thus shape what becomes valued classroom practice – guided a significant shift from ‘the how’ of classroom management to a more appropriate focus on ‘the what’ of academic discourses and practices. With current global changes and developments in EAP, it is timely to re-examine the principles underpinning the scheme and assess its enduring value. We do this through the lens of *epistemic relations* from Legitimation Code Theory to reveal different orientations to ‘the what’ and ‘the how’ of EAP practice and what this enables. A mapping of both pre-CFTEAP and CFTEAP-informed criteria makes visible the underpinning values, forms of pedagogy and affordances for professional conversations, but also spaces for seeing alternatives and possibilities, offering a practical tool for teachers and observers.

1. Introduction: the professional problem context

Our creation of an EAP observation scheme in 2009 to enhance professional practice was prompted by conversations we were having in our mutual roles as practitioners, pre-sessional programme directors, and BALEAP Accreditation Scheme (BAS) assessors. In particular, we discussed our reactions to and concerns about the rapid growth in international student numbers on preparatory pre-sessional courses that UK EAP centres were experiencing at the time, a situation that continued until the global pandemic of 2020. A key effect of this rapid increase was the need for EAP centres to hire increasing numbers of teachers with little or no EAP experience in order adequately to staff these high-stakes courses.

EAP units were recruiting more teachers from EFL settings where Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) remains a major influence on English language teaching practice and is largely advocated to develop communicate competence (Littlewood, 2007). In this approach the means are also the end and so learners are engaged in communicative tasks aimed at promoting general fluency in the target language, with the teacher mainly adopting the role of facilitator or guide. Whilst EAP is also motivated to enhance learners’ communicative competence, CLT is only one of numerous influences on EAP practice which also include discourse analysis and critical theory (Hyland & Shaw, 2016). For pre-sessional courses, the approach is a more targeted focus on academic discourse and the associated practices needed for successful integration into the various disciplinary discourse communities in English-medium higher

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education. This in turn leads to a teacher role that requires a broad range of competencies to develop students' ability to analyse and think critically, in order to understand the epistemology, research practices and discourses of particular academic disciplines (Bruce, 2017).

Many new teachers from CLT backgrounds entered the EAP classroom applying CLT practices in good faith, either unaware that EAP requires a different approach or assuming that their expertise could be simply transferred across (Alexander, 2012). The immediate impact of this situation was a struggle to resolve the tensions between being *teachers* setting up interactive classroom activities focused on practising all four skills to achieve communicative competence and the EAP agenda of *practitioners* working with disciplinary texts. In other words, there was a clear tension between CLT, with its greater focus on the 'how' of managing the classroom to facilitate and maximise student interaction, and broader EAP practice, where the focus is very much on the 'what' of academic discourse and practices.

As Hyland and Shaw note (2016: 1) "the communicative demands of the modern university involve far more than simply controlling linguistic error or polishing style", and many teachers with CLT experience reported feeling deskilled when they entered the EAP classroom (Ding, Jones, & King, 2004). Our own observations of such teachers as part of our BALEAP Accreditation Scheme visits highlighted few conscious links between classroom activity and the wider higher education context. Teachers were largely unaware of their students' subject-matter expertise and lacked the procedural knowledge needed to scaffold them towards their target academic communicative competence. As Alexander (2012) points out, this lack of awareness can impede effective learning for the students concerned, and so there was a need to mitigate against its potential impact on both student experience and course quality.

One means would be for new teachers to engage in some form of education and training, but at the time, and as remains the case now, there were few recognised formal training routes available into EAP. Ding and Campion (2016) highlighted the lack of support for teachers' professional development in the transition from more general English to EAP. Sizer (2019) notes more recently only a handful of EAP training opportunities advertised on the BALEAP website: six short courses, four courses at postgraduate certificate level and three at MA level. Moreover, for teachers teaching EAP for only a few weeks a year on a pre-session course, engaging in formal training may not be a practical or indeed financially viable option. The response from centres was to provide teachers with some form of induction, but induction programmes cannot adequately communicate the entirety of EAP theory and practice, the intricacies of the local context or the teaching practicalities of intensive, high-stakes courses in a few days, nor can they serve to develop the required competencies.

It is also important to recognise that, prior to 2008, there had been no clear articulation of what it meant to be an EAP practitioner. In 2005 BALEAP pioneered a plugging of this gap by establishing a TEAP working party to develop what became the Competency Framework for Teachers of EAP (CFTEAP) and the first considered attempt through professional consultation to define the range and complexity of the skills, abilities and knowledge needed to teach EAP effectively. The CFTEAP was published in 2008 and updated in 2014 (BALEAP, 2008; 2014) and established four main areas of competencies EAP practitioners related to *academic practice, EAP students, curriculum development and programme implementation*. While it has been critiqued for its potentially UK-centric focus (Ding & Campion, 2016), the CFTEAP now increasingly informs EAP practices more widely and is currently undergoing further review through a more critically international lens.

The problems we were facing in the UK pre-session context were only part of the wider issue of universities grappling with the increase in student numbers, the internationalisation of higher education and the resultant drive to reform the curriculum to align with the global shift to knowledge-based economies (Shay, 2015). The challenge universities faced in preparing graduates for the knowledge economy informed our discussions about developing and reconceptualising our respective EAP curricula in our own centres. It became clear a shift was needed from the 'E' to the 'AP' of departments and towards a conscious placing of disciplinary knowledge at the centre.

While working on broader curricular developments, we knew it was necessary to effect meaningful change locally, in the EAP classroom itself and to find better ways to develop and support teachers new to EAP on our pre-session courses. Curricular changes were outpacing our classroom observation practices and, looking more closely at what we were using, we realised that our respective observation criteria were largely inherited from CLT-type values and practices. We and other EAP centres were thus unwittingly using criteria that were unfit for purpose, being focused primarily on the *how* of teaching (e.g. classroom management) and not on the *what* of EAP (e.g. academic discourse). And so, despite induction sessions attempting to prepare teachers to engage students in the different disciplinary discourses and communities, our observation criteria with their inherent gaps were unconsciously steering them to focus on classroom performance. Moreover, teaching was being unfairly evaluated against inherited practices applied uncritically in EAP and the criteria afforded feedback/forward conversations of an emaciated nature.

All these concerns outlined above coincided with the reconvening of the TEAP working party in 2009 to explore how the CFTEAP could inform different areas of professional practice. Aware of what we were doing in our local contexts, it was suggested that our nascent ideas become a formal project, supported and endorsed by BALEAP, to create an observation scheme for EAP. The observation scheme we developed was educationally oriented and practitioner-led, grounded in the contexts and experiences of expert practitioners. It was introduced to the BALEAP community in 2010 and subsequently applied and evaluated over the following decade by a variety of accredited institutions. The next section describes how the observation scheme was designed and developed, and the principles it was built on.

2. Observation criteria: principles, literature, design

The development of the observation scheme in 2009 initially started as part of the curricular developments we were undertaking in our respective centres and was informed by our evolving understanding of EAP itself. In particular, our practices were becoming

increasingly determined by a university-invested sense of what EAP curricula and classroom pedagogies should be as they relate to academic contexts and disciplinary practices. This was borne of engagement with important work in academic discourse research (e.g. Hyland, 2004; Swales, 1990), together with notions of EAP students and teachers becoming ‘ethnographers’ of disciplinary practices (Johns, 1997). This contrasted somewhat with what we saw as CLT-inherited values such as ‘learner-centred’ approaches focusing primarily on *how* students were learning, at the expense of *what* they were learning. In the teaching practice we observed across the UK as BAS assessors, this was evidenced in, for example, easy-to-complete tasks, lack of intellectual challenge, writing from experience rather than from sources/data, and language learning separate from disciplinary practices. While we didn’t have the terms to articulate what we were sensing at the time, we were becoming frustrated with what was primarily a knower rather than knowledge-and-knower (cf. Maton, 2014) oriented approach to EAP.

We determined to focus on what was happening in the classroom and on our desire to move student activity away from practising the four skills to meaningful engagement with disciplinary texts and content. In terms of speaking skills, for example, our goal was to shift from performative speaking practice of functional language and empty critique on a general topic, to readings-led, intellectually challenging seminars. Students would have something to say on academic issues and engage in deeper, more sustained consideration of concepts and perspectives. We wanted learners to be viewed by teachers less as ‘just students’ and more as researchers- and scholars-in-training who were often already bringing considerable subject knowledge with them.

This changed perspective on student activity and identity would also mean fundamental changes to the activity and identity of some of the teachers we were working with. The influence of social constructivism on language teaching practice had, at least in the UK contexts most familiar to us, led to more interactive, learner-centred classrooms and students more actively involved in their own learning (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Equally, humanistic approaches had also encouraged student-centred education in those contexts, with feelings as well as knowledge being viewed as central to the learning process (e.g. Arnold, 1998; Moskowitz, 1978; Stevick, 1990). In the humanistic classroom, the teacher creates a safe and comfortable environment so that students can focus on their learning in the steps towards the goal of self-actualisation. The teacher adopts the role of facilitator focused on attending to their students’ affective or emotional needs rather than presenting themselves as a disseminator of knowledge.

This emphasis on the social dimensions of learning in much of the inherited discourse around language teaching practices had removed the traditional ‘sage on the stage’ role from the teacher, reduced teacher-talk, and replaced it with a ‘guide on the side’ persona (King, 1993), facilitating learning in less directive ways with occasional input and correction. There was also a greater concentration on how the individual develops and on setting up activities to facilitate students’ self-expression and build self-esteem. Whilst such a shift has been very positive in many ways, we were concerned that in EAP this had led to the over-foregrounding of classroom management to facilitate interactive activities at the expense of serious engagement with the substance of EAP learning: academic discourse; in other words, a possibly unproductive dichotomising of learning (as ‘good’) against teaching (as ‘bad’), and a sidelining or even diminishing of the value of EAP teacher knowledge and teacher responsibility.

We wanted EAP teachers to engage side-by-side with students in text-mediated discussion and examine together how language choices shape the messages authors and students create. Echoing McWilliam (2005, 2008), we wanted teachers who were neither ‘guides on the side’ (facilitators) nor ‘sages on the stage’ (lecturers) but rather ‘meddlers in the middle’ or mediators of the messiness of learning. This meant putting the EAP teacher back in the spotlight as expert knower and active negotiator of students’ emerging understandings of academic discourse and higher education practices. McWilliam (2008) argues, building on Bauman’s (2004) challenge to educational norms around what effective teaching means, that shifting the focus from the teacher to the learner is a step in the right direction, but does not go far enough. Rather, a more interventionist, meddler-in-the-middle approach creates a space for a greater emphasis on the experimental culture of learning and making errors along the way, supports a disposition to learning, and in repositioning ‘teacher and student as co-directors and co-editors of their social world’ (McWilliam, 2008, p. 263) better prepares students for the complexities and uncertainties of the future.

To engender this desired principle of a partnership between EAP teacher and student, training would only go so far to realising this goal. Other means were needed to fully promote and embed it. A review of our classroom observation practices and observation criteria would, we felt, move the teacher-observer focus away from the ‘how’ of performative classroom management towards the ‘what’ of knowledge practices and the substance of student learning.

A second principle of the new observation scheme was thus to actively support the transition into this ‘meddler in the middle’ partnership of teachers as co-creators and co-collaborators with students by shifting the observation conversation away from traditional CLT-inherited discussions. It would serve to nudge less experienced teachers into thinking in less CLT-oriented ways by signalling how EAP pedagogies might need to differ from and expand beyond the CLT approach. We wanted to encourage meaningful conversations about students’ academic learning gain, critical engagement with texts, developing academic discourse repertoires and the relevance of classroom tasks to students’ future contexts and practices. At the same time, we hoped to mediate conversations with more experienced EAP practitioners around continuing professional development and the enhancement of student learning. A further goal was for both manager and peer observers to benefit from the observation process (Gosling, 2005), by encouraging reflection on and developing their own practice, such that, for all parties, the observation would be ‘a springboard for sharing ideas and stimulating reflective dialogue’ (O’Leary & Price, 2016, pp. 114–115).

An initial review of the literature at the time showed there was scant research on classroom observation and less on the development of individual teaching observation criteria. Despite this lack, there was, however, evidence of broad agreement that the purpose of observation is to enhance teaching quality, make teaching more effective and improve student learning (e.g. Washer, 2006). This purpose is filtered into three broad observation models: i) evaluative: compliance and QA oriented; ii) developmental: professional development in dialogue with an expert practitioner-observer; and iii) collaborative: peer-based critical reflection and development (e.g. Gosling, 2005). Most observation research at the time was conducted in mainstream school settings (e.g. Wragg, 1994)

with emergent themes such as initial teacher education and exploratory, non-judgmental and reflective approaches to observation practices, as in the second and third observation models. For EAP, there was little research with more being written on observation in EFL, particularly the teacher-belief/classroom-practice relationship (e.g. Li & Walsh, 2011).

Taking HE rather than EFL as our working context, observation itself was not very commonplace in 2009 and mostly a peer-based activity (O'Leary & Savage, 2020). HE only really started to take observation seriously when the Teaching Excellence Framework was introduced in 2016 and only then largely as an evaluative, quality assurance tool to monitor and measure teacher performance (O'Leary, Cui, & French, 2019) as in the first observation model. The observation process can then be perceived at best as a box-ticking exercise and at worst a threatening process of assessment and judgement (Washer, 2006). The fine line between evaluation and development in observation practices is not necessarily straightforward (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 108), and even when the intention is developmental, it may still be interpreted as evaluation with a manager-observer. While our motivations were primarily developmental and collaborative in nature, we knew the scheme would have to support the articulation of standards and quality for EAP teaching practice and the student experience, essentially amalgamating all three observation models.

The above activity coincided with the reconvening of the TEAP working party in 2009 and led to us being asked to expand it to create a new observation scheme for EAP, supported and endorsed by BALEAP. As there was little available literature to build out from, our work proceeded on from this point as a critical dialogue between our own sense of problematic practice as practitioner-managers as outlined above, the CFTEAP, and existing schemes for observation. Eight other institutions shared their observation schemes with us, providing a total of ten for comparison.

We divided the development into three phases. In the first phase, using the CFTEAP as an interpretive lens, we identified major gaps and oversights in our own observation forms, and drew on the other eight EAP unit observation schemes for comparison. In the second phase, as we sketched out a preliminary set of criteria, we attempted to embody a set of values and principles not explicit in existing teacher-facing documentation. Our new draft criteria were informed closely by the CFTEAP, in particular by the sub-areas of *academic practice (academic contexts; academic discourse; academic disciplines)* and *EAP students (student needs; student learning)*. In the final phase, we moved iteratively between the new fledgling criteria and all observation schemes collected, rewording, adding and combining criteria to achieve maximum coverage, while shifting principal focuses to more academically invested values and practices articulated in the CFTEAP.

Across all three phases, we discussed beliefs and feedback practices and our varying experiences of the CFTEAP informed criteria with observer-colleagues. We also refined perspectives via national engagement at dedicated BALEAP events (e.g. Gillway, 2016; Kirk, 2010). The outcome was to settle on four new categories for EAP observations:

- Meeting learner needs
- Enacting the syllabus
- Integrating academic discourse
- Linking learning to academic contexts and practices

Thirteen observation criteria were also developed and clustered under the above headings. The full scheme appears at the end of this paper as Appendix 1 [1]. In wishing to shape not only an observation form but also an overarching framework and approach to observation practices with teachers, the four macro-categories were conceived relationally and a simple visual representation emerged (Fig. 1):

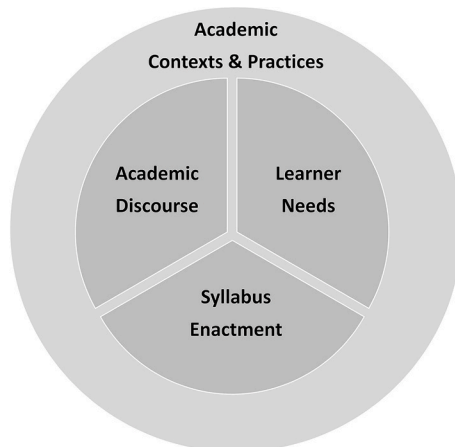


Fig. 1. Relational conception of EAP observation categories.

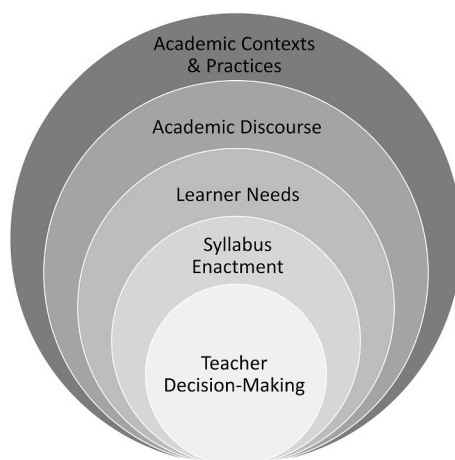


Fig. 2. Putting teachers at the heart – Refined relational conception of EAP practices.

This helped represent, in particular, the sense in which ‘section 4’ of the observation form, *linking learning to academic contexts and practices*, should serve to inform all other areas. This was later refined to suggest an ‘influence hierarchy’ of sorts for all the areas with, crucially, teacher agency and decision-making at the heart of practice. Fig. 2 shows the relational conception discussed with teachers.

The observation scheme developed in 2009 was presented publicly in 2010. With now over a decade having passed since its development, the scheme has stood up to wide public scrutiny and engagement (Gillway, 2016; Kirk, 2010) and remains embedded in BALEAP’s Accreditation Scheme. It has proven immensely successful in shifting discourses in our own institutions and, anecdotally, elsewhere, overcoming power dynamics between the observer and observee, orienting pedagogies towards academic discourse and the practices of higher education, and thus suggesting its enduring currency. The 50th anniversary of BALEAP and this special edition of JEAP on practitioner scholarship provides the opportunity to revisit and evaluate the criteria. What is it that the observation scheme enables – or does not? What is the nature of the ‘messages’ it embodies about EAP? And how might this shape affordances for classroom practice? In the next section, we address these questions through the prism of Legitimation Code Theory – or LCT. Given its focus on knowledge practices and our own early reorientation towards academic knowledge in EAP pedagogy, which shaped the CFTEAP-informed observation scheme and its embedding, LCT provides an ideal analytical lens.

3. Revisiting criteria in terms of the pedagogic practices they embody: LCT analysis

LCT is a rich theoretical framework that enables seeing, analysing and shaping knowledge practices in education (Maton, 2014). Its concepts offer a means to look beyond the surface wording of observation criteria to the messages they embody about what is valued in the EAP classroom. One useful tool from *Specialization*, a dimension of LCT that theorises what and who matters in practices like developing disciplinary curricula (Clarence, 2021), is the concept of *epistemic relations*. This concept “highlights that practices may be specialized by both *what* they relate to and *how* they so relate” (Maton, 2014, p. 175), and has been enacted to impactful effect, e.g. to understand how engineers bring together different forms of knowledge to solve real-world engineering problems (Wolff, 2021).

There are two components of epistemic relations. ‘The what’ of practices is captured by *ontic relations* (OR) or the relative strength of the identity of a phenomenon. ‘The how’ of practices is captured by *discursive relations* (DR) or how strongly bounded the approach taken to a phenomenon is from other approaches (Maton, 2014, p. 175). These relations describe continua of strengths, from stronger (+) to weaker (–) and can be plotted together as axes to form *the epistemic plane*, seen in Fig. 3. Practices in a given context may be located anywhere across the plane but the different quadrants provide four principal ways of understanding them – four *insights*. In practices drawing on *situational insight*, ‘the what’ is more clearly bounded but the approach is more open (OR+, DR–); e.g. where EAP teachers are expected to provide language feedback on student seminar performance but are free to choose how they do this. *Doctrinal insight* is seen when ‘the what’ is de-emphasised and an agreed or prescribed approach is foregrounded (OR–, DR+); such as the procedures that undergraduate students must follow to submit their assignments on a given degree programme. *Purist insight* describes practices where both ‘the what’ and ‘the how’ are emphasised (OR+, DR+); for example, researching doctoral viva discourse using conversation analysis. Finally, where practices emphasise neither ‘the what’ nor ‘the how’ (OR–, DR–), they may be characterised by either *no insight*, where ‘anything goes’ (e.g. brainstorming creative solutions to a problem), or by *knower insight*, where the practice is not about knowledge (epistemic relations) but is instead specialized by *social relations* or relations to knowers; e.g. when a teacher discusses how students are feeling about an upcoming assessment.

The context-free nature of LCT concepts means they need to be enacted and ‘fixed’ for the specifics of a given research or practice context. We did this by developing a *translation device* (Maton & Chen, 2016) for epistemic relations, shuttling back and forth between exploration of the observation criteria and the concepts of ontic and discursive relations. No instances of criteria embodying *no insight* were found during this process and so the bottom-left quadrant (OR–, DR–) was enacted only as *knower insight*. The translation device is given at the end of this paper as Appendix 2. The enactment of the epistemic plane for our analysis of EAP observation criteria appears

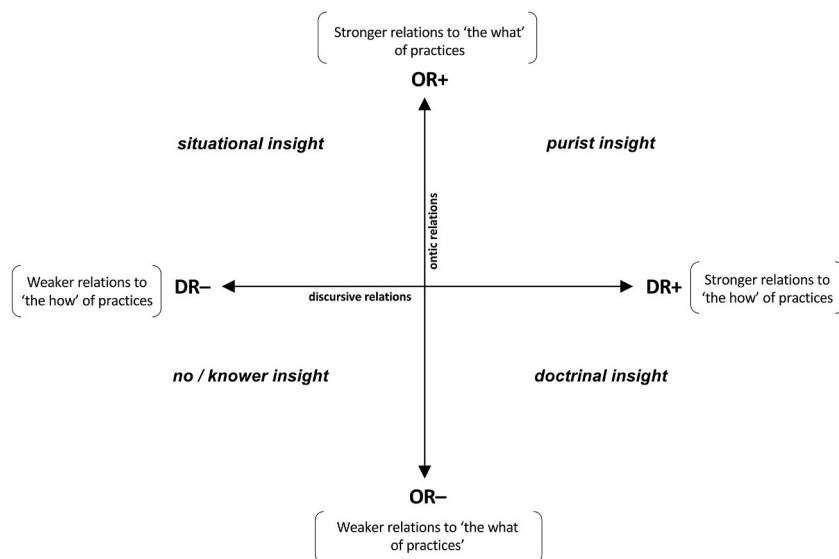


Fig. 3. The epistemic plane. Adapted from Maton, 2014, p. 177.

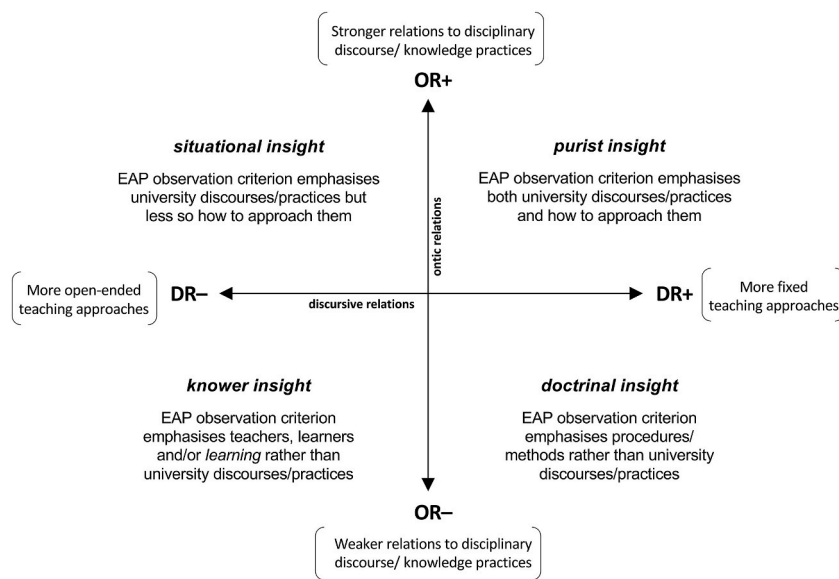


Fig. 4. Enacting the epistemic plane for EAP observation practice.

below as Fig. 4.

In order to enrich our investigation and to aid the development of our analysis and enactment of concepts, we analysed several observation schemes using our translation device. We compared in particular one pre-CFTEAP scheme (see Appendix 3) with the scheme developed and discussed in this paper, to explore what LCT analysis would reveal for two quite different sets of observation criteria. The purpose in the present paper is not primarily to compare schemes but, given stark differences between them, we provide a brief summary analysis of the pre-CFTEAP criteria further below in order to illustrate the diversity of values that may be embedded in observation schemes of different kinds. Our analyses were ‘stress tested’ through presentation and discussion with LCT-UK regional group¹ members; practitioners who were also EAP/language teaching educators. This enabled interrogating the messages underpinning different criteria in ways that moved beyond our own biases and led to clearer shared understandings and interpretation.

¹ LCT-UK is a group of practitioners and researchers from the UK and elsewhere enacting LCT in their work. The group is affiliated to the LCT Centre for Knowledge Building at the University of Sydney.

3.1. Summary findings

The first finding to emerge from analysis is that criteria are distributed across the epistemic plane, representing each of the four *insights*. Fig. 5 below provides examples:

This diversity of underpinning orientations to classroom practice underscores the complexity of EAP teaching in certain contexts and the expertise required. Criterion 12 embodies purist insight, for example, emphasising both ‘the what’ (academic language) and ‘the how’ (‘a discourse approach’) of teacher practices. Criterion 14 also emphasises ‘the what’ (‘lesson aims/objectives, language, skills, content and processes’) but not how the teacher should go about ‘relat[ing these] to the academic practices and conventions of the university context’. This represents situational insight, leaving greater space for teacher agency and flexibility of interpretation, but potentially also uncertainty for less experienced EAP practitioners. In contrast, criterion 1 and 2 both de-emphasise ontic relations (OR–), orienting less to the curriculum per se and more to, respectively, stronger bounding of ways of practising and thus doctrinal insight (audience-sensitive ways of communicating), and to ‘individual needs and roles’ of learners and thus knower insight.

The requirements of a given lesson and student group are likely to involve all of the above practices. Observation criteria do not dictate what a teacher does in the classroom, of course, but here the graphic mapping of illustrative criteria helps to make visible something of how teachers must constantly shift between different *insights*. Different orientations to ‘the what’ of the curriculum and ‘the how’ of classroom enactment may require different forms of pedagogic practice. Teacher expertise in EAP thus means taking tours across the epistemic plane, pivoting dynamically between curriculum and classroom, shifting emphases in the service of context and student-sensitive pedagogy. From a wider-angled perspective, these different focuses may also be seen as representative of values in the pedagogic field of EAP; epistemic plane analysis brings into view not just what observation criteria do but the range of possibilities for EAP teaching practices more broadly.

It is not the case that the observation criteria are distributed equally across the plane, however. Analysis reveals a significant clustering of criteria on the left-hand side of the plane and, particularly, in the situational quadrant. The messages transmitted through the CFTEAP-informed scheme thus tend predominantly to de-emphasise particular procedures and ways of enacting pedagogic materials, exhibiting weak discursive relations (DR–). This can be seen in Fig. 6²

We suggest that this locating of many criteria in the *situational quadrant* is what enables the scheme’s enduring currency across contexts. Other *insights* are represented but there is a more strongly bounded focus on ‘the what’ of EAP – the curriculum, academic discourse and the practices of university departments – while also less strongly bounding how teachers approach this in their methodology. By embedding more explicit orientations to academic discourse practices, the criteria have become only more relevant with time, as EAP professional and research communities develop richer understandings of how the knowledge practices of disciplines can and should shape EAP curricula and pedagogies. By shifting towards the left-hand side of the epistemic plane, the CFTEAP-informed

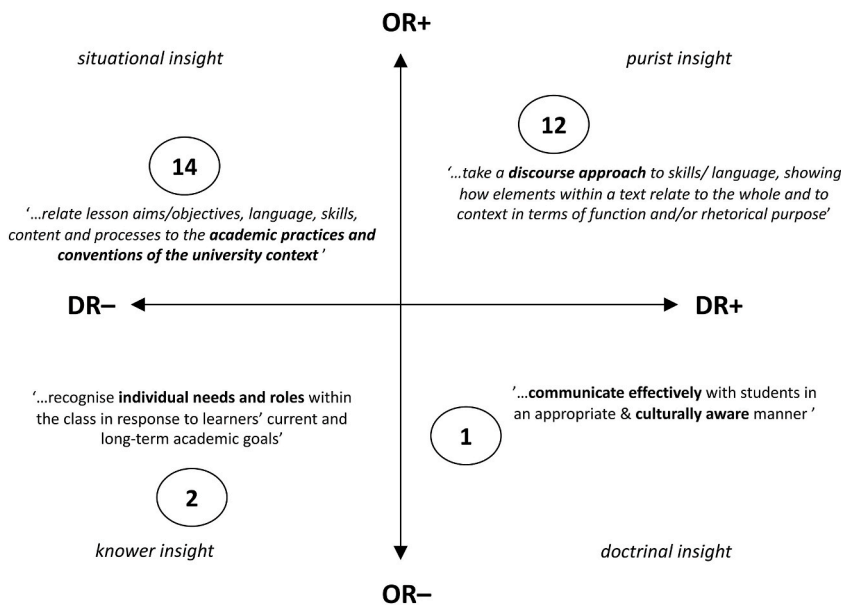


Fig. 5. Observation criteria embodying the four *insights* of epistemic relations.

² Please see further below for discussion of criteria 3 and 9, which do not fall neatly into a single quadrant, as represented by the dotted arrow (3) and the oval spanning two quadrants (9).

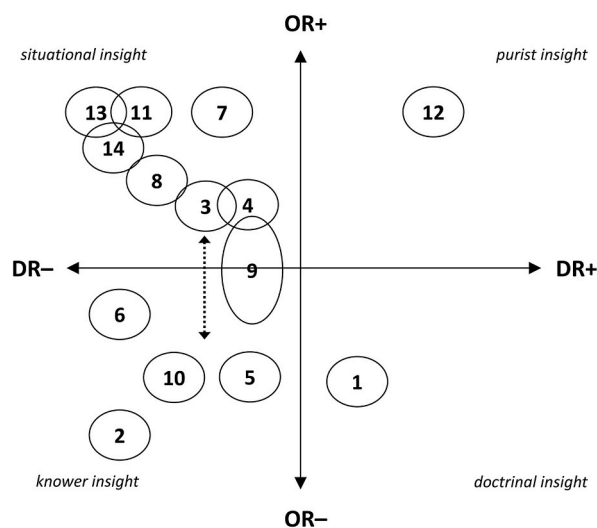


Fig. 6. Clustering of the CFTEAP-informed observation criteria.

scheme also enshrines greater recognition of EAP teacher expertise and agency, inviting the practitioner to make the pedagogic choices that best enable their students to engage with *the what* – with texts, data, knowledge and language. This serves to highlight, e.g., where ‘teacher freedom’ exists in contexts with a prescribed EAP curriculum. It also underscores and offers a refined view into the challenges faced by some teachers transitioning into EAP (e.g. [Campion, 2016](#)).

This is not to say that the criteria are universally valid or applicable, however. There needs to be, we would argue, a close alignment between the observation criteria used on an EAP course and any explicitly espoused messages about what is expected and/or valued in teaching colleagues. This has been the case in our own contexts, where the embedding of observation criteria over a number of years informed, and was informed by, developments in the curriculum and conversations with teachers and observers. This may not necessarily always be true. If this observation scheme is used in a particular EAP unit or on a given programme, it would suggest something about the local approach, informing practitioners what the centre values in the classroom and in teacher practice. A misalignment between the messages implicit in observation criteria and messages in staff meetings, curriculum documentation and/or CPD opportunities are likely to create dissonances than may result in confusion, resistance or conflict. An observation scheme is most productively seen as functioning within a complex course ecology and thus cannot simply be imposed without discussion or separated from the rest of what happens on a programme. Explicit discussion, interpretation and establishing shared understandings of the values embodied in criteria – and thus of the kinds of conversations most readily afforded by them – are likely to be important for course coherence, relations with teachers and productive observation conversations where criteria are used as a mediating artefact.

This point can be underscored most visibly by briefly contrasting the clustering of criteria in [Fig. 6](#) with that of a pre-CFTEAP observation scheme ([Appendix 3](#)). Applying the same translation device for epistemic relations reveals a significant clustering of criteria in the doctrinal quadrant. The embodied value system thus orients almost exclusively to ‘the how’ of practice; to procedural decision making around, e.g., lesson structure, timing and monitoring of learners. As discussed earlier in the paper, this was the (untheorised) realisation that led originally to our exploration of other observation schemes and the development of a CFTEAP-informed alternative. The very different clustering of values in the pre-CFTEAP criteria can be seen in [Fig. 7](#) below.

This scheme and several like it that we worked with when developing an alternative were used in EAP contexts for many years. It may well be the case that similar schemes remain current across the varied institutional and cultural contexts in which EAP provision takes place. Considerations of classroom procedure and methodological decision making are, of course, crucial elements of a teacher’s class planning and may well become focuses for consideration in pre- and/or post-observation discussions. What the mapping onto the epistemic plane demonstrates very visibly ([Fig. 7](#)), however, is the absence of criteria that speak to ‘the what’ of practice; to the EAP curriculum itself, to academic discourse or to the values and practices of disciplines. This absence does not preclude conversations with teachers about what students are actually learning and how the teacher is acting to shape this. However, as we had discovered in our own observation practices, observation criteria can exert their own shaping effects on teacher practice and on the forms of conversation afforded with observers. It is important, therefore, that observation schemes embody the values and expectations of curriculum enactment and pedagogic practice in the local milieu and wider professional context. Mapping with the epistemic plane makes these values visible in a way that affords productive comparison and critical insights. Returning to the CFTEAP-informed criteria ([Fig. 6](#)), we briefly now discuss two such insights that underscore the value of collaborative discussion of observation schemes.

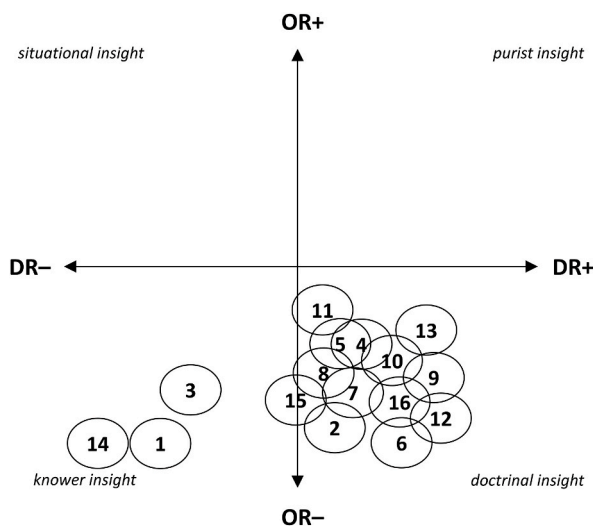


Fig. 7. Analysis of a pre-CFTEAP observation scheme.

3.2. Interpretation of observation criteria: opportunities for discussion with practitioners

Analysis of the observation schemes was not without challenge. It was not straightforward to locate all criteria unambiguously within quadrants. This was a significant aspect of discussion and clarification with LCT-UK colleagues. Criterion 3, for instance, asks how far teachers ‘... create opportunities & stimulus for **critical thinking (academic and/or self-reflective)**’. It was agreed that ‘academic’ and ‘self-reflective’ critical thinking probably signal quite different practices. ‘Academic’ critical thinking was taken to refer ‘outwardly’ to engagement with texts, data, collaborative engagement with ideas and, e.g., the individual, evidence-informed stances that arise from this process. It is thus a knowledge-oriented practice. In contrast, ‘self-reflective’ critical thinking was understood to refer ‘inwardly’ to the development of student dispositions and attitudes; it is thus *knower*-oriented. This might be represented on the epistemic plane as in Fig. 8 below.

This differentiation is potentially important, particularly for conversations around teaching, as it signals different classroom practices and forms of engagement. The use of terms in this criterion might therefore usefully be revisited and clarified. The main point here, however, is that flexibility of interpretation means teachers and observers may not necessarily understand criteria in the same ways. An observation scheme cannot stand alone if it is to shape practice positively and developmentally. The values and assumptions embodied in criteria must be discussed explicitly among teaching and observer colleagues, examining what forms of classroom practice are actually referenced by the criteria and what, if any, alternative interpretations might be. This is particularly important for a scheme like our own, where it develops in one context but may be used elsewhere.

One further criterion worth highlighting here is criterion 9, which asks how far teachers ‘... employ a **classroom approach and teaching methods** appropriate to lesson aims, learner needs and the EAP context’. This can be seen as inviting teachers to draw on different *insights*, moving between different practices that cross the epistemic plane. Framing teacher choice of pedagogy as deferring

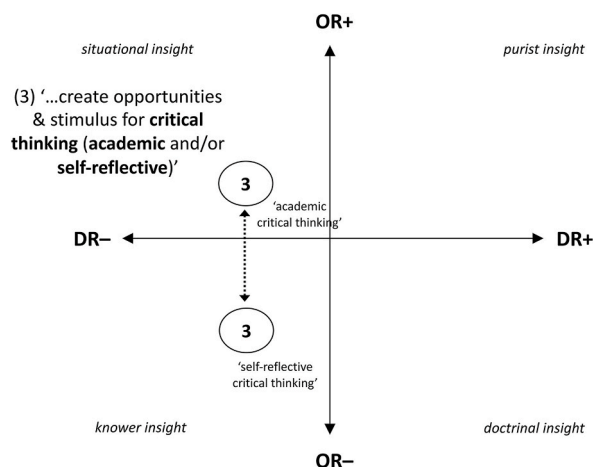


Fig. 8. ‘Critical thinking’ as embodying different forms of practice.

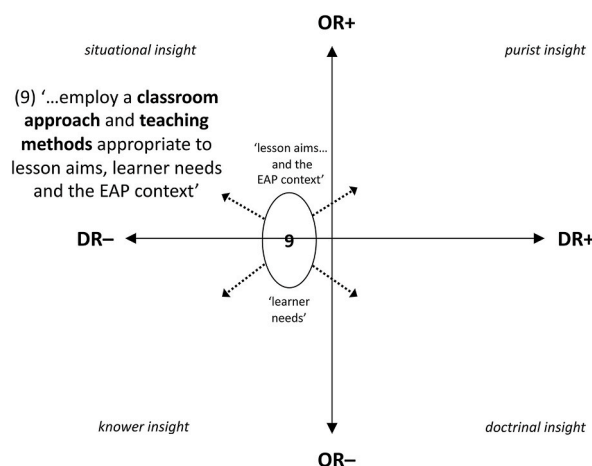


Fig. 9. A criterion that invites teacher agency and touring the epistemic plane.

to the what of the curriculum ('appropriate to lesson aims ... and the EAP context') and pointing also to 'learner needs', the criterion itself spans the *situational* and *knower* quadrants but legitimates teacher agency and the freedom also to move elsewhere on the plane, including to the *purist* and *doctrinal* quadrants. This might be represented as given below in Fig. 9.

In our original development work, this criterion was intended to subsume most of what appears in the kind of observation scheme exemplified in Appendix 3 and analysed in Fig. 7. We wanted observers to assume high levels of classroom management expertise unless they saw otherwise and thus took the decision to collapse all procedurally oriented criteria into this one. With, e.g., the growth of EAP programmes in some local contexts and thus the likelihood of a wide range of expertise among teaching staff, however, it may well be that such methodological conversations become more necessary. Indeed the pandemic of 2020 and the wholesale shift online for EAP units and practitioners may have shifted emphases quite strongly, if temporarily, towards the *doctrinal* quadrant, as everyone grappled with new online platforms, software and ways of working with students (cf. Bruce & Stakounis, 2021). For such changes and contexts there may or may not be the need to unpack a criterion like criterion 9 and perhaps to add criteria that reference certain practices more explicitly.

3.3. Summary: seeing into practices and possibilities with the epistemic plane

Examining the principles underpinning EAP observation schemes through an LCT lens enables a theorised and more nuanced description of how criteria function and the pedagogic practices they may enable or constrain. The stark contrast in criteria clustering between the pre-CFTEAP and CFTEAP-informed schemes exemplified here demonstrates clearly the way in which the latter shifted the discourse and practices in our contexts and elsewhere. Beyond this, however, the four quadrants of the epistemic plane also facilitate a wider-angled view of classroom practice by enabling a range of pedagogic practices to remain in view, whether or not they are represented explicitly in observation criteria, and by making alternative practices and possibilities more visible.

The CFTEAP-informed scheme primarily embodies *situational insight*, reflecting an emphasis on academic discourse and university practices and an openness to teacher choices in classroom enactment. There may be times in discussing classroom pedagogies with teachers, however, when it is appropriate and/or developmental to move away from 'possible approaches' towards a more prescriptive expression of practice for a particular context, or to veer slightly from the curricular focus on academic discourse practices to take care of students' immediate, perhaps non-academic needs. The visible mapping of individual criteria across the spaces of the epistemic plane reflects the potential importance of *touring the plane*, not just in EAP teaching practice but also in EAP observation practice, and of not being funnelled by personal biases (or 'favourite criteria') into overly narrow views of teaching. This is more likely to enable richer exploratory conversations with practitioners.

The notably less populated quadrants of the epistemic plane, revealed via the analysis above, help raise questions that also prompt more expansive ways of thinking about observation and classroom practice in EAP. When might practices need to emphasise both the what and the how of EAP, embodying *purist insight*, for example? More strongly discipline-specific contexts and classrooms may require this, such that EAP pedagogy more closely resembles the pedagogic field of the target discipline; such as engaging medical students in problem-based learning or business students in simulated boardroom discussions. Interpretation of criterion 9 in such environments (appropriacy of approach for learners and context) may need to shift to the *purist* quadrant, becoming slightly more prescriptive about pedagogic choice of tasks and procedures.

When might a shift to the right-hand side of the epistemic plane generally be more appropriate? Might practices in international contexts where EAP forms part of a prescribed curriculum/textbook, where there are particular exams or institutional/national expectations of students (and perhaps teachers), legitimate the strengthening of *discursive relations* to ensure certain forms of classroom practice are taking place? This would be a very different context to those in which our scheme evolved and, while we may not personally agree with such expectations given likely reduction in teacher agency, this nevertheless remains a very real possibility in the

diversity of cultural contexts in which EAP takes place.

As an analytical tool, therefore, the epistemic plane enables seeing beyond *what is* to highlight potential gaps, oversights or alternative forms of practice beyond those that may be familiar. The four *insights* force a wider and more inclusive view of EAP teaching, reminding observers of other spaces and possibilities, even where there may be a need or wish to focus elsewhere in a given lesson or in discussion with a particular teacher.

4. Concluding reflections: on *situational insight* and possibilities for practice

Observation criteria reveal much about how learning and teaching are conceived in a given EAP context. The notion that an observation scheme transmits implicit messages about wider EAP course principles and commitments underscores for us the importance of interrogating these messages with respect to what is being valued in classroom practice. Our development of a CFTEAP-informed scheme was driven by a firm belief that our teachers and the wider EAP community would be better served by more meaningful conversations that orient to academic discourses and practices, and how these shape teaching that meets EAP student needs. The BALEAP Competency Framework and community conversations it was inspiring were instrumental in giving expression to the changes we were seeking, refocusing attention on the ‘what’ of EAP to then shape the ‘how’ and enabling local professional conversations that were connected to wider sector developments and understandings.

Taking this opportunity to revisit the CFTEAP-informed scheme in light of contemporary conversations and through the theoretical lens of LCT enables a more visible and nuanced understanding of the criteria and what they afford for professional practice. Analysis via the epistemic plane suggests their enduring currency and value for diverse international contexts of EAP. We suggest that, notwithstanding local variation in professional focus and need, it is practices underpinned by *situational insight* that provide something of a ‘home base’ for EAP pedagogy by emphasising the academic curriculum while also affording methodological choice and professional agency. Practitioners, observation criteria and collaborative discussions of teaching may tour the epistemic plane in enacted practice but we argue that *situational insight* embodies an underpinning set of core values that crosses contexts. The increasingly global nature of BALEAP membership and of EAP professional communities more generally offers possibilities to investigate this suggestion empirically, opportunities that we are beginning to explore. The focus on knowledge practices that LCT analysis enables may also allow for more equitable inclusion of practitioners with strong knowledge bases into community conversations, including those who are internationally trained.³

The epistemic plane makes EAP classroom and observation practices visible and, as we have demonstrated briefly in this paper, can be used to explore the varying affordances of different schemes. This might include the criteria used as part of the TEAP Scheme’s accreditation of EAP practitioners (BALEAP, 2014) and other institutional approaches across international contexts. The four *insights* quadrants also provide a concrete reminder of diverse pedagogic practices and possibilities. Used to mediate discussions of teaching, the epistemic plane offers a practical tool and visible record that holds both teacher and observer to account, enabling pre- and post-observation conversations that cross the plane, facilitating richer exploration of teaching. LCT analysis offers teachers and observers a new language, conceptual distinctions and a fresh sense of practical possibilities for future practice and exploration of EAP observation and pedagogies.

Author contributions

Steve Kirk: Conceptualisation, methodology, data analysis, writing original draft, review and editing.

Julie King: Conceptualisation, methodology, writing original draft, review and editing.

Declaration of competing interest

We declare that there are no conflicts of interests.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2022.101139>.

³ We thank Reviewer 2 for this suggestion.

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