

# Bigger than Bieber: The Second International Legitimation Code Theory Conference

Tackling everything from physics to ballet, post-Apartheid social justice to jazz, and political ideologies

Written by Jodie Martin

For a week in early July over 120 scholars, research students and educators from 13 countries came together at the University of Sydney for the Second International Legitimation Code Theory Conference.

Hosted by the LCT Centre for Knowledge-Building, the event offered five days of workshops, papers and discussions. Topics covered everything from physics to ballet, from post-Apartheid social justice to teaching jazz, from vocational education to political ideologies.

What the diverse community and conversation shared was Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), an approach to understanding and changing knowledge and practice created by Professor Karl Maton of the School of Social and Political Sciences. The dynamism generated by the event was soon evident on Twitter. Though Justin Bieber was visiting Sydney, he was beaten into number 2 as a trending topic in Australia by the conference hashtag #LCTC2 during Karl Maton's Opening Address. The conference remained in the top five trending topics through the week.

Since emerging in the 2000s, LCT has grown very rapidly. The way LCT combines theoretical rigour with concrete implications for practice is proving particularly attractive to scholars and educators in places traditionally marginalised or viewed as lower status.

Its impact is primarily in the 'global south', especially in South Africa and in practically-oriented fields such as vocational education and academic literacy. Moreover, the vast majority of scholars are postgraduate students or early career scholars – it is a young field in every sense.

To help support the community, the LCT Centre for Knowledge-Building worked hard to make the conference free of registration costs. Thanks to generous support from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, School of Social and Political Sciences, Department of Sociology and Social Policy, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), not only was registration free but the organisers were also able to support several promising students to travel to the conference.

From Australia, Ellen Scott (University of South Australia) and Jessica Scott (University of Adelaide) presented a paper on conflicts in the vegan community, and from South Africa Martina van Heerden (University of the Western Cape) discussed how feedback lets down undergraduate students in English studies, and Naomi Msusa (University of Cape Town) explored academic literacy among students.

Keynotes were given by Professors Karl Maton and J.R. Martin from the University of Sydney, and Professor Chris Winberg from South Africa. In his Opening Address,

Professor Maton showed how LCT ‘makes the invisible visible’ by revealing the forms taken by knowledge and their effects. This talk was particularly popular among delegates for revealing a long-awaited set of concepts in LCT that offer insight into how different forms of knowledge can be successfully integrated, such as using mathematics in science, bringing together work experience and academic ideas, and interdisciplinary collaborations.

Professor Winberg from Cape Peninsula University of Technology gave a riveting keynote that highlighted how LCT sheds urgently needed light on South African higher education and is unique in revealing the nature of professional and vocational education. As Professor Sioux McKenna of Rhodes University commented, it “really gave us a rich understanding of how we can actually work meaningfully”. Finally, Professor Martin explored how the humanities can be understood using both systemic functional linguistics and LCT, particularly inspiring the significant number of linguists among the delegates.

A total of 80 papers were presented on problems in research, curriculum design and teaching practice from pre-school to university and across the disciplinary map, as well as issues beyond education, such as climate change denial and political news coverage. This diversity of application is one of the strengths of LCT, enabling studies of a wide variety of problems to build on one another. As delegates put it, “it doesn’t matter what discipline you come from, it brings you together in the one space”, in which one can “hear that we have the same kind of struggles and how we can learn from each other”.

Reflecting the nature of LCT as a practical theory, presentations were a mixture of research-based papers and practice-oriented sessions. As Ilse Rootman-le Grange stated, “it really gives you a way of changing what you’re doing. It’s not just a theory – you can now go and really adapt your practice”.

The transformative nature of LCT was also a recurrent theme. In her paper, which won a People’s Choice Award at the conference, Hanelie Adendorff (Stellenbosch University) stated that in grappling with the difficult topic of ‘decolonizing the curriculum’ in South Africa “LCT helped me become more human”. As Vicky Ariza Pinzón of Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla,



The core LCT2 conference team, including Professor Karl Maton (centre)



LCTC2 conference goers

Mexico declared on a slide: “LCT empowers”.

Another hallmark of LCT is the supportive nature of its community. The program was designed to enable as much discussion among participants as possible and a common refrain among delegates was that the discussion was incredibly positive.

As Kavish Jawahar from Rhodes University declared, what distinguishes the conference is “the friendliness! I think everyone is really friendly here, and supportive! Definitely very welcoming!”.

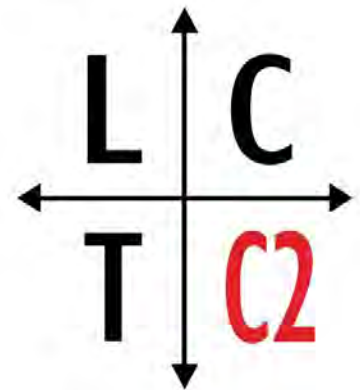
This community is growing: in addition to the 12 groups created over the past two years, three new LCT groups were organised during the conference in Brisbane, London, and Denmark. In addition, international Special Interest Groups were created that focus on different aspects of the framework.

The conference generated considerable excitement among delegates that has continued to ripple outwards. In September, 10 postgraduates and lecturers from three universities gathered in Adelaide for a day of LCT workshops organised by Dr Jodie Martin.

Intensive teaching courses by the LCT Centre have been organised for

2018 in Grahamstown, Johannesburg and Durban in South Africa, Beijing and Shanghai in China, and Boston in the USA. New LCT groups are being created, such as in Melbourne. All these developments are being supported by the LCT Centre for Knowledge-Building. And it won't end there: a Third International LCT Conference will be hosted in 2019 by the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Watch this space!



## LCT Centre for Knowledge-Building

Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) first emerged as a framework for the study of knowledge and education and is now being used to analyse a growing range of practices across diverse social fields, including education, law, politics, art, and public understanding of science.

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