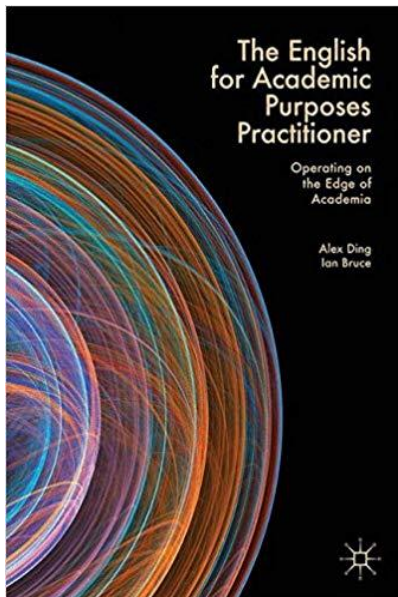# BOOK REVIEW

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AS AN EAP PRACTITIONER

Alex Ding and Ian Bruce. THE ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES PRACTITIONER. OPERATING ON THE EDGE OF ACADEMIA (2017), Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. 250 pp., ISBN: 978-3-319-59736-2 (HBK).

Alex Ding and Ian Bruce start their book with a clear statement of the challenges that the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioner faces: "to induct students into the literate practices and processes of the academic world despite their own ambivalent status within the academy" (p. 2). The ideological context that forms part of the challenge is outlined with a look at the education sector in which EAP operates and a critique of the effects on higher education (HE) from neoliberalism, globalisation, and social movements (Chapter 2). It is followed by a succinct outline of the historical development of EAP and the knowledge-base that currently informs its practice (Chapter 3). Thus, the first third of the book sets the scene before moving on to an analysis of how EAP practitioners enter the field (Chapter 4), can develop their practice (Chapter 5), and grow as professionals within a community of practitioners (Chapter 6). The book concludes with the authors' view of EAP practitioner roles, identity and agency (Chapter 7). Each chapter draws on a heady array of theoretical ideas and in so doing opens up a terrific number of opportunities for readers to critique their own practice, contest their own institution's conduct, and challenge their own ideological leanings.

After an overview of the book in Chapter 1, Chapter 2, "The Wider Context of EAP: Neoliberalism, Globalisation, Social Movements and Higher Education", gives

a big-picture analysis of the neo-liberal direction in which the education sector is moving. The neo-liberal direction involves expanding the scope of the market beyond that thought appropriate by the traditional liberal. For the neo-liberal, price-efficiency and increased quality come from bringing public goods like education into the workings of the competitive market (marketisation). The success of this approach is measured in financial terms and, within higher education, by the expansion of access to higher levels of education for all and the achievement of higher standards.

Ding and Bruce challenge the neo-liberal approach, preferring a "humanist" attitude where universities create and advance knowledge for the public good. They point out that a formal education is an individual process of student development and is difficult, if not impossible, to commodify. Attempts at quasi-market measures within education, such as league tables, simply do not provide the information that a genuine market would need and may create perverse incentives across the sector. Worse, neo-liberalism may generate an attempt to produce an internal market structure within universities or schools, fragmenting the university into cost centres in an attempt to simulate an internal market but creating further perversity of education policy.

How does a critique of neo-liberalism impact on the EAP practitioner? EAP is often delivered and assessed by groups of practitioners outside (at the margins of) the credit-awarding departments of HE institutions. These practitioners can work both inside the university or outside in private language schools. In a market system, a university centre delivering EAP may be seen as a discreet cost centre competing with the external providers. As such, it will have an imperative to be efficient, where efficiency is measured in financial terms, and may be required to expand student numbers and reduce terms and conditions (including professional development opportunities). A key point is that such a centre is isolated from the courses and institution that provide its academic purpose and financial support. Both success and failure in making an acceptable financial contribution may result in privatisation of the centre. What counts is a quick movement of fee-paying students. A dangerous implication is that a perverse incentive looms when success is measured by the number of students passing the centre's in-house (rough-and-ready rather than valid and reliable) assessment instead of attention to the quality of the teaching and the needs of the students.

An EAP practitioner, teaching on a university's pre-sessional course, is working in a competitive market, and will have to argue persuasively to both the students and university (the customers) that their provision is of more value to that offered in a private school.

Chapter 3, "The Origins and Nature of EAP", offers Ding and Bruce's view of the knowledge-base of EAP, the things EAP practitioners draw on to shape, improve and justify their practice (beyond financial measures). The chapter starts by locating EAP within a TESOL needs-analysis hierarchy: English for General Purposes (EGP) > English for Specific Purposes (ESP) > English for Academic

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Purposes (EAP) > English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). The purpose of EAP is "helping learners to study" (a gloss of their earlier definition) often in "specific" academic discourse communities. To achieve this purpose, EAP practitioners draw on a number of fields, the knowledge-base. The five fields that are picked out for summary are: systemic functional linguistics; genre theory; corpus linguistics (each giving a method of conducting a needs analysis); academic literacies; and critical EAP (both with a wider frame of reference). We can picture this relationship as a drawing of a basic flower with the purpose of "helping learners to study" in the middle holding the five petals together. Of course, each petal is anything but simple: as Ding and Bruce show, each represents a hugely complex and rich set of ideas to marshal when "helping learners to study".

Systemic functional linguistics, genre theory, and corpus linguistics bring out the differences in texts which inform all ESP needs analysis as well as EAP. Academic Literacies and Critical EAP have the theoretical apparatus to deepen practitioner understanding of student learning and inform a progressive EAP agenda (including resistance to neo-liberalism).

As a reader, I found it useful to reflect on my own practice and the extent to which my EAP teaching is influenced by the same five fields. I would like to draw attention to two other fields that I think could usefully be included in the knowledge-base of an EAP practitioner. The first is language testing and assessment (Manning, 2017). A knowledge of language testing is essential in university settings where, first, students are admitted on the basis of external, international tests (such as the International English Language Testing System, IELTS) and, second, are allowed to progress onto a university course based on an in-house test which should have equivalence to a stated international benchmark (such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEFR). The validity and reliability of assessment is vital to any education system's regime and is a key element in a university's legitimacy. Knowledge of testing thus puts the EAP practitioner at the heart of the university's admissions and quality systems with the opportunity to influence university practice and policy. The second addition to the EAP practitioner's knowledge-base is course evaluation (see Gillett & Wray, 2006). Knowledge of whether a course is succeeding in its purpose allows EAP practitioners to make informed statements about the value (non-monetary) of their provision. The success of EAP provision cannot be assumed. Recent research at a British university supported the idea that there was a link between language proficiency and success on a destination course, but found that students who applied with appropriate IELTS scores did better than those who entered via a pre-sessional (Thorpe, Snell, Davey-Evans, & Talman, 2017).

The raison d'être of this book is that "the development, identity, role and agency of the practitioner have been largely overlooked in the theoretical and research literature on which EAP draws" (p. 2). This gap in the research base on the EAP practitioner becomes very apparent in Chapter 4, "Entering the Field of EAP". Much of the discussion relies on three small-scale research projects (with

less than twenty interviewees). It also draws heavily on Hadley's (2014) grounded study, which involved ninety-eight participants. However, in contrast with Hadley's extensive empirical data, Ding and Bruce disappoint in not replicating these earlier studies or providing fresh empirical data for their position. There are a little too many hedging devices presaging the claims, such as "*It is probably fair to say that* [emphasis added] the majority of EAP practitioners come to the field having previously worked in TESOL, and that TESOL experience and knowledge underpins much EAP practice" (p. 94). As a reader, I agree with them; but empirical claims benefit from empirical backing.

Chapter 4 has a discussion of the difference between teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) and EAP before moving on to discussing the transition between the two. Both sections turn on the specificity of the needs analysis of EAP. EAP practitioners, many of whom teach through a discourse community-based genre pedagogy, not only need to be able to apply their descriptions of language to unfamiliar text-types but also foster critical thinking and an understanding of disciplinary expectations. Thus, Ding and Bruce return to the knowledge-base and propose that "practitioners need to develop knowledge and expertise in two areas: the methods of enquiry needed to investigate disciplinary subject practices (such as ethnography) and discourse-analytical expertise to unpack and teach the types of knowledge required to unravel and teach the writing of disciplinary texts" (p. 110). They are absolutely right: the more a practitioner can develop these areas, the better they will be able "to empower" their students. However, I am mindful of something Aristotle said: "It is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits" (Nicomachean Ethics Book I, 1094b.24). How deeply into the areas of the knowledge-base do EAP practitioners need to go to refine their own pre- and in-sessional provision within their professional context?

EAP is taught around the world through different pathways, institutional statuses, and employment contracts. Wherever the practitioner is based, however, it is the knowledge-base that will help her develop provision that will facilitate bridging the gap between a student's present and target needs. Ding and Bruce have practical suggestions for how the practitioner's understandings can be enhanced through engagement with others in the EAP discourse community in a process of "developing and refining one's overall knowledge of the practice of EAP" (p. 111). When the application of this new knowledge is communicated back to the EAP discourse community (in conference presentations, for example) the EAP practitioner is engaging in "scholarship". Scholarship is contrasted with "research" which is "a planned, systematic investigation that aims to inform one specialised aspect of the knowledge-base on which the field of EAP draws" (p. 111). The reader can relate this distinction back to the flower picture introduced earlier. Scholarship involves sharing and evaluating how an EAP practitioner helped learners to study with the EAP discourse community (the middle of the flower); research makes a contribution to the discourse community of one of the petals.

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Ding and Bruce offer good advice to someone wanting to transition from TESOL teaching to EAP: develop your EAP knowledge-base, take advice about developing and disseminating good practice through small EAP studies (scholarship), and then develop and contribute to a specialised interest (research).

Chapter 5, "Developing EAP Practitioners", gives a detailed analysis of how an EAP practitioner is socialised into the role and the "cultural capital" associated with it in comparison with other professions and academic fields. In doing so, it looks at the ways EAP has been marginalised and the development of practice hindered. Helping learners to study is, of course, central to most EAP practitioner roles and draws on the EAP knowledge-base. But the knowledge-base is built, as we have seen, on various fields. This variety creates "a key concern for practitioners and EAP more generally – how does the EAP practitioner embody EAP knowledge which itself is considered *eclectic* and *interdisciplinary*?" (p. 127). Ding and Bruce argue that this embodiment is achieved *in situ* as there is not necessarily prior socialization into the practice or required academic qualifications for the individuals engaged in it. Eclecticism can make interdisciplinary provision look muddled and lacking in quality standards.

Ding and Bruce argue that EAP "as a discipline" has yet to achieve the status as a profession: it does not have sufficient cultural capital. They argue that EAP practice (as a type) does not provide sufficient cultural capital because it does not have behind it "a considerable number of years of specialized study and socialization before entry" or a "process of (slowly) accumulating cultural capital through credentials, qualifications, scholarship and research" (p. 128). This is a collective predicament rather than an individual one: one of the practice rather than a particular practitioner.

In "EAP Practitioners and Communities" (Chapter 6), Ding and Bruce go on to review the relatively few post-graduate qualifications in teaching EAP (TEAP) and also the British Association of Lecturers in EAP (BALEAP) scheme. They are supportive of, but underwhelmed, by both. Their key concern is not so much what they include (the knowledge domains), but their limited ambition and accommodationist approach. There is little in them to challenge EAP's marginalization, the mores of the academy and sector neo-liberalism. They then review reflective practice in education generally and EAP, distinguishing reflection from research. Both reflection and research increase the standing of the EAP practitioner, but to be effective requires a solid knowledge-base, methodological skill, and opportunities for publication.

Chapter 7, "The EAP Practitioner: Role, Identity and Agency", reviews the key issue of the book, contrasting the view of EAP as a support activity with that of EAP as a field of academic study and research. The complexity of the knowledge base extends much further than TESOL training and requires an engagement with scholarly activity and sustained EAP practice over a whole career. Such a career can be enhanced by specialised research projects. Ding and Bruce see it as a plus that this will mean being involved in "two discourse communities, EAP and a

specialism" (p. 200) with the practitioner's identity attaching to the specialism. There may be danger here on two levels. Theoretically, it may leave EAP as a practice without its own conceptual heart. Practically, it could leave EAP practitioners looking for teaching hours in their new specialism, without being recognised there, but still needing to pay the bills with their corporate support hours.

To sum up, left-of-centre analyses of the state of education can evoke pessimism. It would be unfortunate if someone read the book and thought they had better steer clear of EAP. Ding and Bruce provide the theoretical tools to understand the context of the EAP practitioner. They also provide a positive road map for the development of both individuals and the EAP community. In the presentation of the knowledge-base, they show that EAP is a rich practice to enter, and one which has great opportunities for discovery. As a reviewer, I have drawn attention to two fields of knowledge that have the tools to demonstrate the value of EAP practice to both students and institutions in ways that are persuasive to even a neo-liberal mind assessment theory and course evaluation. *The English for Academic Purposes Practitioner. Operating at the Edge of Academia* is a valuable contribution for both EAP practitioners and colleagues across their institutions.

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