Clare Carr, Clare Maxwell, Ania Rolinska and Jennifer Sizer

EAP teachers working in, with and through the creative arts: Reflections on a conference workshop aimed at exploring current practices

INTRODUCTION

In the wider context of the well-documented growth of student numbers in UK higher education (HESA, 2019a), and an increasingly diverse student population (Jack, 2020), there is evidence of growing numbers of students studying subjects in, or related to, the creative arts (British Council, 2017; HESA, 2019b). EAP practitioners are increasingly being required to design courses and materials to develop academic language, skills and practices for and within the creative arts. While terms such as 'English for Business' and 'English for Law' are familiar terms in EAP, it seems much less attention has been paid within EAP to some of the other professional,

vocational or practice-based disciplines, and, in particular, those related to the creative arts.

The range of resources and research available to EAP practitioners working with creative arts students is relatively limited: ESAP course and reference books, for example, tend to feature a series of recurring disciplines (see ESAP range from the Garnet Education, 2021), excluding creative arts subjects. While there is a range of very helpful research for developing an understanding of learning contexts specific to the creative arts (the design studio, for example) and practices and assessments (such as verbal presentations and critiques) (Caldwell & Gregory, 2016; Ferreira, Christiaans & Almendra, 2016; Fleming,

1998), these tend not to focus on language or EAP pedagogy.

Language-focused research is not entirely absent from the literature (see excellent EAP for creative arts research from John & Soe, 2017, and Riley-Jones, 2017, for example); however, the broad and diverse nature of creative arts disciplines has resulted in a focus on language use within very specific subject areas, such as fine art (Riley-Jones, 2012 and 2017) and graphic design (Lasserre, 2012; Perks & Whittingham, 2017). This can also be seen in the wide range of research and resources focusing on language use and writing processes within specific genres and/or subjects, such as the art history essay (Riley-Jones, 2012, 2017), reflection in art and design (Doloughan, 2002), exegesis (written artefact commentary) (Paltridge, 2004), the 'crit' (or critique) commonly used in fine art, architecture and design (Melles, 2008; Morton, 2016; Swales, Barks, Ostermann, & Simpson, 2001) and guidance on writing about music research (Herbert, 2012) and music writing style sheets (Holoman, 2014). Such subject and genre-specific examples provide a welcome insight into the nature of specific areas within the creative arts, but may not be relevant to all EAP practitioners, particularly those in more wide-angled ESAP contexts.

This exploratory paper reports and reflects upon discussions and observations that emerged from a conference workshop aiming to examine and share experiences of language pedagogy in EAP for the creative arts. The workshop was the consequence of the formation of a group of practitioners with a shared interest in EAP for creative arts following an *EAP in the North* event in 2018. Although from diverse disciplines (Art, Design, Film and Television, Architecture, and Music), we noticed common ground: in particular, in the varied and sometimes opaque expectations of writing and assessment practices, and the prevalence of 'fuzzy' (Medway, 2002) and innovative genres which can make these disciplines a challenging area of practice. A strong desire for a less 'atomised' and more collegial approach across institutions was expressed, which would allow us to share 'tales from the field'. Keen to explore the possible benefits of such an approach, the workshop offered an opportunity to share our own experiences and discover more from others working in similar situations.

The workshop utilised a 'world-cafe' format (Groppel-Wegener, 2019) with discussion tables representing diverse professional contexts within the Creative Arts.[1] Attendees recorded and shared thoughts and reflections creatively by writing comments on paper tablecloths. The following questions were loosely set to guide discussions, and provide the focus for this paper:

- Is EAP in the creative arts all that different to EAP in other disciplinary areas?
- Does it need its own disciplinary space?

Reflections on the themes that emerged from discussions on each table and their implications for EAP are outlined in the following sections.

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[1] A 'Film and Television' table was chaired by Katherine High, of the University of Bristol, who was unable to contribute to this article. We would like to thank her for her participation in the workshop.

CREATIVE AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES (ARCHITECTURE)

Hyland (2002) suggests we 'must go as far as we can' in terms of specificity. Specific subjects within a larger field may vary in terms of genre, language and student needs and experiences. The European Commission suggests there are at least three distinctive sectors within the creative and cultural industries: core arts (e.g., photography), cultural industries (e.g., music or film) or creative industries (e.g., design or architecture) (O'Connor, 2010). These sectors and subjects within the creative and cultural industries differ in focus from creative to commercial outputs (Throsby, 2008) and vary in artefact production, with emphasis on services, experiences, originals or content (O'Connor, 2010). This variety in creative outputs and artefacts also impacts the variety of accompanying texts and genres. For example, a subject-specific genre such as an exegesis, rather than a thesis, may accompany a visual arts original artefact (Paltridge, 2004), or, as discussed in the below section on design, genres associated with specific occupations – rather than with academia – such as design specifications accompanying artefacts from architecture, music or design. This diversity in subjects, artefacts, associated texts, student needs and experiences, as well as context, and the previously-mentioned limited range of research and resources makes EAP for the creative and cultural industries an interesting, but also challenging, undertaking.

Discussions centred on how specific we can go when teaching EAP for creative and cultural industries, considering the previously-mentioned complexities. Attendees were introduced to unobtrusive textography research (Sizer, 2019a), used to explore the Creative and Cultural Industries faculty building. Textography is a research method which combines traditional textual analysis with ethnographic approaches (Sizer, 2019b). The aim of the research was to ascertain the extent to which the Creative and Cultural Industries faculty constituted a community. Unobtrusive textographic research indicated the faculty was distinctive from other faculties and shared a building, linguistic landscape, distinctive history and university clock with a faculty-specific rhythm (Swales, 1998; Traweek, 1988). However, research also suggested separate communities exist within the Creative and Cultural Industries faculty, with their own textual, temporal and spatial practices.

Attendees reflected on EAP groups they work with in terms of structures, both external (physical) and internal. First, they sketched and described spaces and buildings used by students. Many reported 'being' in different buildings to their creative arts students. This separateness is in part due to the vast number of different learning spaces used by the creative and cultural industries, e.g., games development labs, TV studios, fashion studios and architecture studios, many of which are also unfamiliar learning environments for EAP practitioners (see the next section on art and design for further discussion on studio learning). There was also an interesting discussion on different subjects/courses within creative arts being housed in a range of buildings, or even a separate campus or areas. Practitioner-perceived benefits of engaging with students at the site of learning were reported alongside the associated logistical difficulties this entailed. Attendees also expressed difficulties in grouping creative arts students for EAP due to the diverse range of internal

structures and courses in different contexts, as well as of outputs and artefacts. The consensus was that, as EAP practitioners, we must go further and be more specific across creative and cultural industries subjects due to the diverse range of practices, particularly textual and spatial practices.

Art and Design (A&D)

The discussion focused on a new pre-sessional course in English for the Creative Disciplines (ECD) at the Glasgow School of Art (GSA), whose design draws heavily on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and pedagogies typical of the creative education context: studio-, inquiry- and object-based learning. It features a small studio component, directly feeding into EAP teaching activities and assessments; for example, a studio exhibit is accompanied by an artist's statement.

In the attendees' view, the studio was likely to provide authentic conditions for contextualised language practice. This is because active learning which 'involve[s] students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing' (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p. 2), for example, through engagement with objects from the GSA Archives on the ECD course, creates opportunities for 'facilitat[ing] the acquisition of communication' (Chatterjee, 2010, p. 180). Therefore, the attendees were surprised by the preliminary data from the 2018 pilot of the course, which revealed that the students felt sceptical about including studio projects in the ECD syllabus. We debated the possible reasons, including students' expectations of pre-sessional courses and perceptions of how language interacts with studio practice. The literature shows that Art and Design (A&D)

students often value 'making' as the primary way of self-expression (Lynas, Budge & Beale, 2013) and therefore sometimes see verbal communication, especially written, as troubling, overly complex and even redundant. Their motivation for taking a pre-sessional course is not to develop as an artist, but, as one ECD student confessed, to 'jump through the last hoop' before being admitted onto the prospective A&D programme. Around the table there was agreement, however, that the pedagogies inherent in studio teaching, such as student-led exploration, group work, peer feedback and critique (ibid.) are characteristics of the EAP classroom, and this similarity should be capitalised on.

The conclusion drawn round the table was that the deeper knowledge of the specific disciplinary practices in A&D may be instrumental in rationalising the choices behind the course design and teaching methods. Knowing how learning happens in the studio is likely to allow the EAP practitioner to align their pedagogy where possible and appropriate, and clearly demonstrate to the students that language is relevant to their studio practice and that the social aspects of communicative language teaching could help the student socialise into the A&D academic culture more effectively.

Design

It has been noted that students of applied and 'emergent' disciplines (Baynham, 2000), such as design and other creative arts subjects, are often required to produce a wider variety of writing tasks, encompassing a broader range of genres (Stierer, 2000; Nesi & Gardner, 2006). Discussions on the 'design table' explored the variety of written genres students are expected to produce in

the design disciplines, and the implications of this on EAP. The launchpad for discussion was a selection of sample student genres from Masters programmes offered at the University of Leeds School of Design (Table 1). Attendees were invited to examine and reflect upon the genres, and to share their own experiences.

Table 1 Student samples examined during the workshop

Programme	Module	Assignment genre
MA Fashion, Enterprise & Society	Research methods	Research proposal
	Dissertation	Dissertation
		Creative project
MA Advertising & Design	Visual communication	Portfolio
	Persuasion	Reflective report
MA Design	Digital design practice	Portfolio
	Design thinking	Reflective report
	Research methods	Critical review
		Case study

The samples were, to an extent, deliberately selected to showcase variety, and this was a key observation. Attendees noted the presence of both 'traditional' academic genres, and more 'professional' genres. Much attention was paid to the latter, mostly due to a lack of familiarity with them. Although in name they appear to fit categories identified by Nesi and Gardner (2012), on closer examination, attendees

acknowledged the difficulty of 'categorising' or 'defining' such genres. The two 'portfolios', for example, differ in purpose, structure, content, style and language: the design portfolio documenting and reflecting on a design process and outcome, the advertising and design portfolio more closely resembling an advertising campaign proposal. The prevalence of 'hybrid' or 'fuzzy' genres (Medway, 2002) was apparent: manifesting features of a mix of genres, whether academic, professional or creative. The creative project, for example, contains features of a traditional dissertation (abstract, literature review, methodology), alongside features of a design portfolio (design rationale and sketches) and business reports (market analysis and business plan). Attendees shared their own experiences of 'fuzzy' genres encountered in applied creative arts disciplines, and the challenges this can present to students in navigating disciplinary conventions.

Overall it was felt that a genre-based approach is important if students are to understand how their writing may vary within their own subject area. Attendees agreed that EAP practitioner access to student genre samples from their specific context is fundamental, since professional samples often cannot sufficiently exemplify the features of the genres students are producing in practice. Ultimately, this emphasises the need, particularly within Design and other disciplines absent from corpora of student writing (such as the BAWE corpus), for EAP practitioners to seek and foster collaborative relationships with departments and subject specialists. Acknowledging that in many contexts this may not be possible, it highlights the potential benefit of cross-institutional, discipline-focused forums and groups

where practitioners can continue to share experiences, ideas and practice.

Music

Wingate (2015) has highlighted the improvements in discipline-specific literacy instruction which could be achieved by drawing upon the expertise of writing and subject specialists. A range of sample tasks set as part of the first two years of an undergraduate Music degree and some accompanying teaching resources being developed by an EAP practitioner, in close collaboration with colleagues from the Music department, were used as a medium through which to discuss the workshop's guiding questions. The tasks discussed are used in an in-sessional context with 'home' and 'international' undergraduates.

As observed in discussions at the Design table, attendees noted that Music students are expected to engage in a variety of text types while completing written assignments. Across the pathways of the Music degree, written assessments require traditional 'academic' and 'pedagogic' genres, such as essays and literature reviews, as well as some 'professional' genres such as design specifications (Nesi & Gardner, 2012).

Attendees also commented on the use of metalanguage and specialist terminology in some of the teaching materials, e.g., 'anthropomorphisation': this language was used in explanations in the department and needed clarifying to students. The importance of being embedded in a department as an EAP practitioner, in order to develop a shared understanding of the discipline's practices and expectations, and the language used to effectively communicate these practices and expectations, was discussed.

The multimodal nature of some tasks was also noted; for example, in some cases, the response to tasks required the integration of analysed musical citations. Another task required the production of a critical edition of a work by an 18th-century composer with accompanying text to justify the decisions made in the production of that edition. The range of genres, writing cultures across pathways and use of evidence raised the question of whether students working in creative arts such as Music were required to write a wider range of genres than for other disciplines and how best to ensure that students were equipped with the knowledge, writing skills and language they needed in order to excel.

Discussion and conclusion

The workshop discussions and the opportunity to share experiences of teaching EAP in a variety of creative arts contexts allowed attendees to explore and compare how these differences are manifested: be it through the different temporal and spatial aspects of teaching or the overwhelming diversity and often experimental nature of the written and spoken genres students are required to produce. The discussions highlighted some of the key distinctive features of creative arts pedagogy and practices, most notably work/practice-based orientation, studio-based and object-based learning, multimodality, and the use of a wide variety of professional and/or hybrid genres, often co-existing alongside more traditional academic practices. This contributes to a different dynamic in the relationship between the creative arts and academic disciplines.

At the same time, in terms of ways of being, doing, thinking and using the language, much variation was observed

between the different creative disciplines and the discussion highlighted further fragmentation within each. It is worth noting that the nature of this paper, reporting as it does on key ideas and shared experiences emerging from a workshop, presents limitations in its scope. Inevitably, the observations highlighted are limited to the ideas and experiences raised by participants on the day, and the number of disciplines represented is similarly limited: other areas within the creative arts – film and TV, the performing arts, to name but two – are absent. With further exploration, a much bigger picture would of course emerge, with additional examples of common practice and/or further fragmentation to consider.

These limitations, however, serve only to strengthen the perceived need for further research and/or scholarship in this area, for example, in relation to a disciplinary corpus or devising robust analysis tools suited to innovative and/or multimodal genres. From an EAP perspective, the workshop discussions suggest that EAP in the creative arts should indeed occupy its own disciplinary space: since although there seems to be adequate research from the creative pedagogy perspective, links with EAP are not always clearly established or elaborated on to meaningfully help EAP practitioners working in such a variety of contexts. An embedded ESAP approach is the ideal means of facilitating an increased awareness of disciplinary practices

and conventions in this area, and the increasing numbers of creative arts students certainly appear to warrant working towards a greater understanding of these disciplines. Clearly, closer collaboration with departments and subject specialists is required in order to develop a better understanding of these distinct pedagogic practices, and the expectations departments may have of their students. In turn, E(S)AP practitioners have expertise to share with creative arts departments in terms of developing student and staff language and genre awareness and academic literacy practices. In addition to this, further initiatives promoting cross-institutional exchange of knowledge and good practice could further enhance the development and understanding of EAP in the creative arts, an area that has been under-explored up to now. This would particularly benefit those working in contexts where collaboration with departments is a challenge. Ideally, in order to keep the momentum and further consolidate and investigate the EAP in the creative arts, a more formalised platform would be beneficial which would support sustained scholarship, regular CPD and knowledge exchange. The response to this workshop, as well as the events that inspired it, suggest there is an appetite for this and we are optimistic about the opportunities that the recent approval of the new BALEAP Creative Disciplines Special Interest Group may provide.

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