

## **Baleap conference April 2017:** **WORKING TOGETHER = LEARNING TOGETHER**

### Accessing the schema of your students and the subject specialists

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#### **Bio**

I am lecturer in the English for Academic Study department of School of Modern Languages at Glasgow University. I have worked there since 2010 on a range of EAP courses. I design and deliver skills and language for LLM, pre-sessional and in-sessional. I also designed and delivered pathway courses in law content for Kaplan from 2012 to 2016. I qualified in law in the mid 1990s although I left legal practice after only 4 years. For 2 years I worked in legal publishing before commencing my English teaching career in 2002.

#### **Poster narrative**

This poster is inspired by two philosophical musings, first by Wittgenstein, second by Thomas Nagel. The theme is that subjective reality is an essential in communication and that in order to understand others, we must be able to experience their subjective world.

In teaching, my belief is that courses focus on formal schemata when teaching about reading and writing but need to focus much more on content schemata. The practical question for EAP is how to provide that. I have referred to this as '*explicating*, not *activating* schemata'.

Some assume that students bring content schema in their own language and need to learn the language, including vocabulary, in English.

This may not be the case. Based on the idea that we don't know what it's like to be a bat, or that if a lion could speak, we would not understand it, language meaning is relative and depends on producer and receiver sharing schema. Producers may not provide enough context for us to understand them because they do not anticipate who the reader will be or anticipate if the schema is present (schema may be assumed to exist and to match). Context must be analysed to find if this is the case because students may not be able to relate concepts to their own reality simply via translation or through most dictionaries. The solution may be to choose another text.

In addition, in academic study, it may not be enough for students to arrive at an approximation of meaning; they may need to understand the prototype – the prototype may be a relative positioning of an item/concept in a semantic field. This idea is particularly meaningful for law because, as Dworkin says, "interpretation is construction" (consider the common law role of judges)

How to put this into practice is what has concerned me for a couple of years or more. Cognitive science has an interest in measuring similarity between words but because the words are mental representations and subjectively defined, constructing models is problematic. Much work and application focuses on Artificial intelligence and information retrieval, but I have found relatively little within education.

What I have been attempting to do is access schemata of teachers and students and measure 'semantic relatedness' and 'semantic similarity' considering lexis in terms of ontologies among other things, and trying to utilise this understanding of the mental lexicon to aid all language skills. This poster focuses on how it may help with selecting reading texts.

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### Software

<http://www.predictiveanalyticstoday.com/kh-coder/>

<http://ws4jdemo.appspot.com>

<http://swoogle.umbc.edu/SimService/>

<http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn>