WARWICK UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE 2023 REPORT

Representing the TAFSIG and attending my first BALEAP conference by Marousa Pavli

TAFSIG's presence and presentations

The TAFSIG was represented by Graham Shipman, the webmaster, and Marousa Pavli, ordinary SIG Committee member who is involved in the piloting network and is one of the contact person for those of you who wish to contribute to the SIG's work by sharing with its members ideas, projects, interests related to assessment. Other SIG Committee members who attended the conference and delivered talks were Rob Playfair, (co-convenor), Sam Barclay (Events Officer), Chris Smith (ordinary member). Graham Shipman also presented his work at the conference.

The report below written by Marousa provides information about conference information, talks, social events as well pre- and post-conference thoughts on her experience as a first-time BALEAP Conference participant. The talks mentioned are those attended by the writer and the criteria for selecting them were exclusively associated with her own academic and professional interests. Talks related to TAFSIG topics appear first and then they are followed by non-TAFSIG talk information.

To explore all recorded conference sessions, you can follow the link provided below:

YouTube BALEAP 2023 Biennial Conference

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0xk8t5VPtuu00x2mGsaY3r0HJa-LD5wI

In addition, the report includes links to all talks that are relevant to the interests and activities of the TAF SIG.

Pre-conference thoughts: When my decision to attend the conference was finalized, I was thrilled that I would have the chance to attend my first face-to-face international professional conference post-Covid. I am one of those professionals who during Covid tried to look at the bright side of life and turn the many threats (of the disease and its consequences on our physical, mental, psychological and financial health) into an opportunity in an attempt not to be overwhelmed and swept away by the despair that seemed to surround us all. Along these lines, one of the things I'd done was joining the BALEAP community, firstly, by becoming an individual member and, a few months later, by joining the TAFSIG Committee, as an ordinary member. The first step has given me the opportunity to attend a significant number of online CPD events and get to know other BALEAPers, with whom I share professional interests, experiences and aspirations. The second step, that of assuming a role on the committee, has broadened my scholarship awareness and familiarization with processes and procedures associated with the role. It has also provided me with the opportunity to work with a group of people who were very knowledgeable in the field and keen to develop as professionals, as well as encouraging and friendly and collegial in their attitude to the committee members and the wider BALEAP community. It has also been very rewarding that I have felt that I could contribute in my own little way to the committee work. From what you've read so far about my BALEAP experience you can understand the excitement I've felt when I found out that I would be at the conference and meet onsite the people that I'd met and worked with online and be able to attend talks on matters of professional interest to me.

Prior to my departure I had studied the programme thoroughly and highlighted the sessions I wanted to attend. With about 7- 10 concurrent sessions per slot, we had access to a vast array of diverse talks, workshops, discussions. We were really spoilt for choice and finalizing decisions on what to attend was quite tricky as I'd found multiple talks per slot I wanted to attended, but in reality I could only attend one. Engaging topics relevant to the theme EAP Under Deconstruction included criticality in EAP, interdisciplinarity, diversity and inclusivity, collaboration, differentiated instruction, AI in teaching and assessing, reflection on teaching, learning and feedback provision, genre analysis, task

integration, practitioner identity, needs analysis, online teaching and testing, well-being, culture integration, and pedagogical practices.

At the conference   Wednesday 19th of April

After arriving at the venue and collecting my conference badge, I met with other committee members and had a nice catch-up chat. The conference started off with the SIG Fair during which attendees had the opportunity to talk with representatives of each SIG and explore possibilities of contributing more actively to the SIGs. Fellow TAFSIG committee members Graham Shipman, Chris Smith and Rob Playfair, and I were present at the TAFSIG stand hoping to meet a lot of BALEAP members who would come to say 'hi' and have a chat, but, in reality, the turnout was not that big. I think that the fact that the SIG Fair was scheduled during lunchtime rather discouraged members to approach SIG stands, in general, and, maybe, quite rightly, they'd chosen to have lunch and mix and mingle with fellow BALEAPers instead. Future BALEAP Conference organisers may wish to reconsider the 'when' and the 'how' of the SIG Fair to make it work better.

After the TAFSIG Fair I attended the talk entitled **'Involving students in the assessment of their writing - The use and misuse of assessment criteria in EAP' by Dr Phil Smyth, University of Reading**.

The talk looked at the ways we tend to view and use assessment criteria and their limitations and suggested a more effective approach. He supported that existing approaches see criteria as non-negotiable and lacking both student involvement, and mediative and dialogic features in assessment. Instead, he recommended viewing assessment as a mediated learning experience and criteria as 'fuzzy' while knowledge is conceptualized both in an explicit and tacit way, through activities including observation, imitation and participation. These activities are based on doing, comparing, making explicit meaning co-construction and helping students develop skills in teacher-led discussion.

Dr Smyth's talk:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7p_kk-CyHo4&list=PL0xk8t5VPtuu00x2mGsaY3r0HJa-LD5wI&index=10

In the evening we had buffet -style dinner provided at the beautiful venue 'The Slate' overlooking a lake. Coming together and uniting with friends and colleagues or making new acquaintances with people with whom we share professional and academic interests was enjoyable.

Thursday April 20th 2023

Below you can see brief notes on talk content and the Youtube link (when available) as well as information on evening social event.

Will the next student essay you mark be written by A.I? Implications of a recent A.I technology development on the future of the teaching of EAP writing skills   by Helen Beech & Angela Xia, Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University.

This talk focused on writing as a means of engaging in the process of thinking and reflection and stressed the importance of process over product and argued for a more project-based approach in assessment in the light of the development of A.I. technology. The presenters suggested moving away from conventional ways of assessing academic writing (such as timed essays or longer written projects) and rethinking our assessments. More specifically, they proposed offering writing- intensive courses to small groups of students in order for them to receive individual feedback. In addition, speakers talked about the need to continue to upskill our knowledge about the benefits of AIGL and discussed assessment models that can include reduced writing and emphasise speaking, potentially using a viva approach.

Helen Beech and Angela Xia's talk

In the evening dinner was a three-course meal served at the beautifully- decorated Panorama venue. There was low music, a couple of speeches given by the BALEAP organisers and publishers and the whole atmosphere was festive. Socialising and chatting with friends and colleagues from the past and talking about the current EAP contexts and future developments were enjoyed by all, apart from the food and drink that were excellent.

Friday April 21st 2023

Below is the list of talks I attended on the last conference day. Youtube links are provided where available.

Time to deconstruct needs analysis? By Rob Playfair

This talk explored the idea whether needs analysis should be deconstructed due to the way the term is currently used and the analysis is performed in EAP contexts. Department lecturers and professionals tend to have very different opinions on what students need compared to what students themselves believe they need or want to know. In addition, needs analysis seems to ignore or undervalue student prior educational knowledge and learning experiences while EAP tutors seem to have an unclear position on whether they 'belong' in HE and are often not involved in decision on what students need to learn on the courses they're teaching on, as this is usually decided by course developers.

Online testing. Exploring the use of automatically generated exercises in an adaptive test. By Graham Shipman.

Graham Shipman shared his journey through EAP software development, explaining the huge resources required to fund materials writing in traditional projects. This had led to Graham's interest in self-generating exercises, driven by databases, which used the lexical approach, and built exercises on any text the user wanted. The talk then demonstrated two automatically generating integrated skills exercises that Graham had used to assess language support requirements for arriving international students at Wolverhampton University. He also demonstrated the automatic and semi-automatic marking used and discussed future developments, including the use of AI, emphasising the fact that generative exercises, where students produced pieces of writing, would still require elements of eyes-on assessment, but that AI and other computer automation could be used to bring more efficiency to this process. Finally, Graham emphasised the need for further extensive research and development of such systems before their use in high stakes testing.

BALEAP TEAP Scheme by Paul Hendrie
This session was one of those I had chosen to attend as soon as I had received the conference schedule since I am interested in the scheme and I have started collected evidence for my TEAP Portfolio. During the session I had the chance to meet other colleagues who wanted to find out more about the TEAP Scheme or have started their TEAP Scheme journey. We talked about our context and the scheme and agreed to keep in touch with each other and create a support network that will help us move forward. Paul Hendrie was very helpful and supportive while answering our queries, listening to our worries and thoughts and encouraging us to consider our next steps. I left the session feeling more knowledgeable and confident about the process and I hope I can move forward faster and more effectively in my TEAP journey.

MORE TAF-RELATED TALKS (NOT ATTENDED BY MAROUSA)

Multimodal feedback tool for writing to learn by Iroda Saydazimova, Kholida Begmatova and Liliya Makovskaya, Westminster International University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Ecological validity of assessment on foundation year by Dr Sebastian Lesniewski Bloomsbury Institute London

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AD2UIto7MlA&list=PL0xk8t5VPtuu00x2mGsaY3r0HJa-LD5wI&index=6

Deconstructing first year L2 Undergraduates' early experiences with writing academic assignments by Kat Maciag, Sheffield Hallam University

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztk0h_2s_xc&list=PL0xk8t5VPtuu00x2mGsaY3r0HJa-LD5wI&index=42

OTHER TALKS – NOT RELATED TO TAFSIG

This section consists of titles of non TAF-related talks, short summaries and/or YouTube links (where available) that I have attended and, they are not directly linked with the interests of the TAFSIG. However, I have decided to include them as topics and aspects discussed could influence decisions and practices in terms of testing, assessment and feedback.

Challenging acceptable reading strategies. Reframing multimodal affordances for academic reading in EAP by Jody Bradford

This presentation suggested moving away from teaching reading through tasks that merely promote skimming and scanning and supported integrating language-related competencies (grammatical as well as socio-linguistic ones) in order to help students approach difficult reading more meaningfully. This proposal views reading as meaning-making, using systemic functional linguistics and social semiotic theories to underpin multimodal approaches, and talks about disciplinary reading and intertextuality/ interdiscursivity.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUaFWb2RCPU&list=PL0xk8t5VPtuu00x2mGsaY3r0HJa-LD5wI&index=38

Exploring signature pedagogies in EAP. Problems, principles and practices by Steve Kirk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhdlwRbOuuM&list=PL0xk8t5VPtuu00x2mGsaY3r0HJa-LD5wI&index=26

Are you talking to me? East Asian students willingness to participate in open class interactions online and face to face by Mirena Nalbantova

This presentation examined student expectations in terms of teacher nomination and factors determining student willingness to participate in the teaching sessions. Participants discussed in groups if they nominate students, how and when they do it and how effective (or not) it can be. A number of strategies for encouraging participation and improving the effectiveness of nominations were also provided by the speaker and the participants.

Give us a chance! A call for greater focus on differentiated instruction on presessional courses by Caroline Fletcher

The talk argued for upskilling tutors and strategically implementing differentiated instruction. It was suggested that the former can be achieved by organizing tutor-development sessions while they teach on the course as well as providing opportunities for and encouraging ongoing dialogue among tutors and between tutors and coordinators. The latter can be done through building differentiation into materials in terms of content (what students learn), process (how students learn) and product (how student demonstrate learning).

Beyond the text. Integrating tasks and actions in EAP by Chris Smith.

The presentation proposed working on reading, listening, speaking texts not solely in order to complete comprehension tasks, but integrating tasks and actions through mediation and interaction activities. This integration will promote student understanding of how all skills are connected and will help them shift their learning and study focus from product to process. For example, a student presentation, which is usually reading-mediated and lacks

spontaneity and interaction can alternatively become a group-speaking seminar activity, which will be based on a listening text and will promote interactional speaking.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SriVHmqoUOs&list=PL0xk8t5VPtuu00x2mGsaY3r0HJa-LD5wI&index=22

Conference Organisation and Venue facilities

The conference was organized by Warwick University and was held at the Warwick University Campus. The Warwick Arts Centre was the hub where attendees and presenters were welcome by the organizing committee and the helpful registration desk volunteers. Lunch and refreshment breaks as well as the SIG Fair on Wednesday took place in the Foyer Area of the Centre, while the amphitheatre and additional rooms in the same building were used for the 'Unplenary', the Room 101 meeting and the Exhibition. In addition to this facility, rooms in the Social Sciences and Faculty of Arts buildings were allocated for sessions. Organisers and volunteers were very busy, but helpful and friendly and the event was very well-thought of and organized. There was a lot of communication before and during the convention by the conference committee ensuring that participants were well-informed about the event and given clear directions on reaching the venue, using the facilities, attending the sessions and making the most of the whole experience. Emphasis was also given on collecting participant feedback on the specific sessions attended and the overall evaluation on the event.

Post-conference thoughts

Overall, the conference was highly successful and engaging. I have talked with a number of conference participants and they all commented on their experience positively. It offered a valuable platform for EAP professionals to share ideas and practices, stay up-to-date on trends and recent developments in the field. It certainly encouraged reflection on choices in and out of the (online or physical classroom) and hopefully has given participants food for thought on EAP aspects that may need deconstruction in order to better serve the purposes of the field. Personally, even at the conference, while and after talking with fellow participants and attending sessions I started questioning and reconsidering certain things about my practice and I am sure that as time goes by and I think retrospectively about the conference, my reflection and thoughts on EAP matters will become more fruitful.

I sincerely hope that this first-time BALEAP Conference attendee positive experience is only the start.
Already looking forward to the announcement of the 2025 BALEAP Conference!