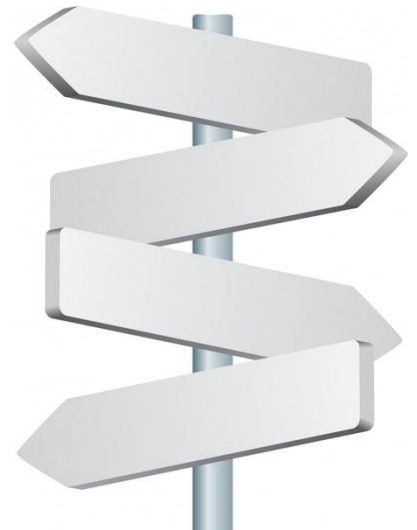# Genre, Academic Literacies and metacognition: theoretical "wanders" and their implementation in EAP pedagogy

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My physical "wanders"

Applied Linguistics, English Department, Stockholm University

Educational Linguistics, Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University

Research topics: disciplinary discourse (mathematics, anthropology, history), writing for publication, teaching postgraduate writing, and brief excursions into language policy and academic reading...

My practice

How can I best prepare my students for the literacy demands of university and beyond?

# "There's nothing more practical than a good theory"

- Lewin (1952, p. 169)

Argument: As EAP practitioners, we benefit from exploring different theories, approaches, and frameworks to address pedagogical challenges we encounter in our everyday practice.
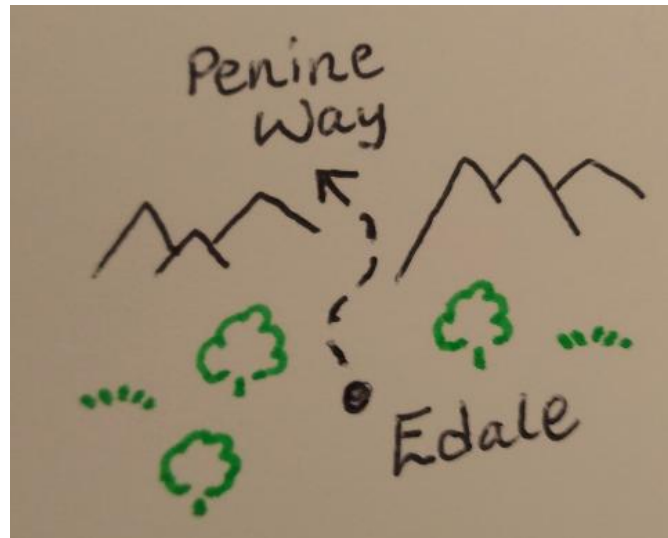
Outline

- My starting point: Genre theory and practice

- Academic Literacies and course design (McGrath & Kaufhold, 2016)

- Metacognition and task design (McGrath, Negretti & Nicholls, 2019)

- Conclusion
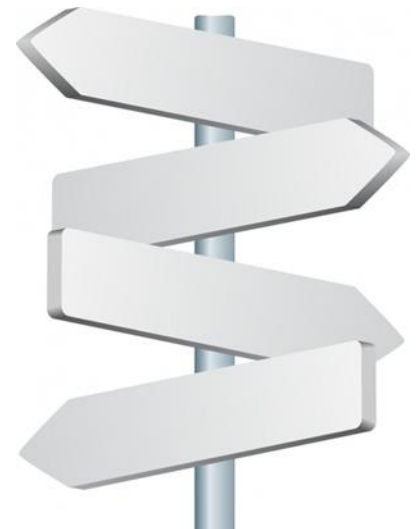
Part 1: Genre

Genre theory

"...excluding genres from the classroom is not really an option, as they are the primary means through which humans communicate in writing"

(Tardy, 2016, p.129)

Genre pedagogy

- Transition from novice to writing expertise through disciplinary socialisation (Prior, 1998);

- Rhetorical consciousness raising (e.g. Swales 1990).

- Exploration, analysis and comparison of examples of disciplinary writing - what do successful writers do? (e.g Swales & Feak, 2004)

- Investigation of rhetorical features based on highlighting convention and **variation** (what is *probable* and what is *possible* (e.g. Tardy, 2016);

Variation

The CARS model (Swales 1990)

Move 1 Establish territory
-claim centrality
-make topic generalisation
-review items of previous research

Move 2 Establish the niche

Move 3 Occupy the niche

Introduction from Nelson (1990)

Professor: *This assignment should be challenging. I purposely made it difficult. Students have to boil down the information from the lectures and reading and present a concise argument. [Essays could not exceed 200 words.] I believe conciseness forces students to take a stand, to weigh the value of every word.*

John: *This was an easy assignment. All you had to do was reiterate what you'd read. I picked lots of names and cited important-sounding incidents . . . essentially I para- phrased the reports I read. I think this assignment was another case of the instructor trying to have us learn through reiteration of read[ing] material. In my opinion, it didn't work and was a waste of class time.*

These excerpts from interviews with Professor Clark and John, a freshman enrolled in his course, provide important insights into students' interpretations of academic writing tasks.

Genre knowledge
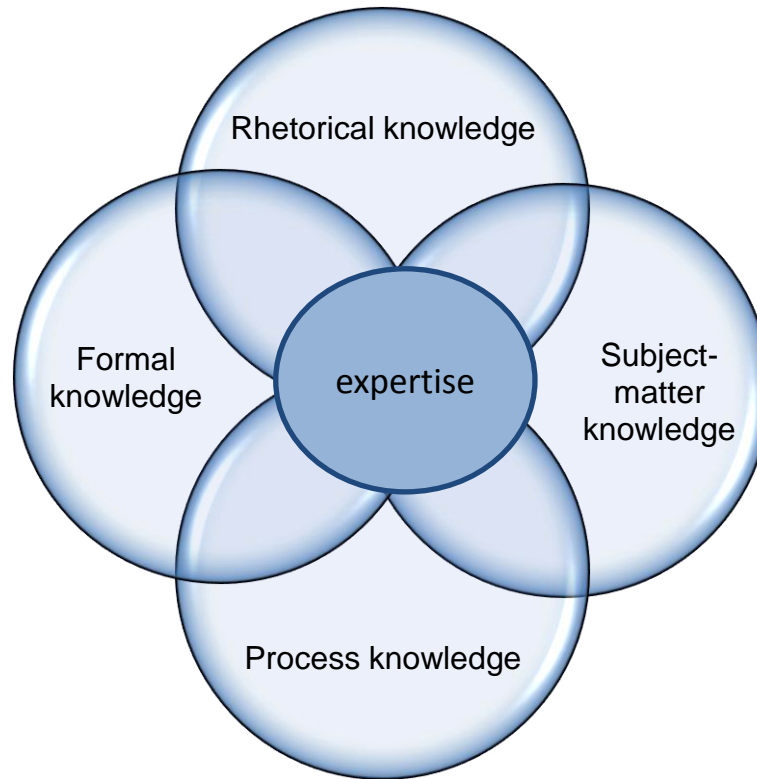
Tardy (2009, p. 22)

If we adopt a fully rhetorical view of genre, genre knowledge must represent more than form … (and) **cannot exist separately** from *formal, process, rhetorical* or *subject-matter knowledge* (p. 20)

Questions, questions...

For example:

How do we teach genre conventions without reifying/entrenching them, and thus inhibiting students' own expression and creativity? (e.g. Tardy, 2016; Negretti & McGrath, under review)

Just how conventional are genres? (e.g. McGrath, 2016). Could they be different? Who decides?

How do we address and help students integrate various facets of genre knowledge?
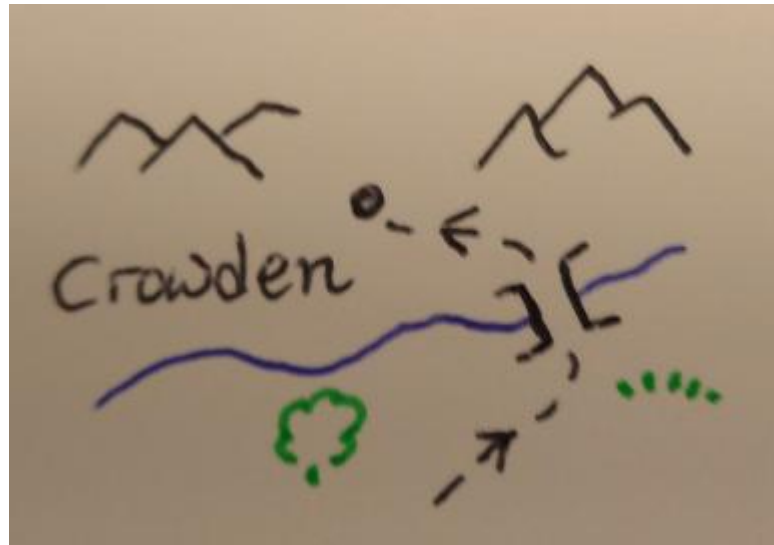
What might an Academic Literacies perspective bring to my practice?

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Part 2: Combining Academic Literacies and genre approaches in course design

Academic Literacies

Key points of interest:

- A critical perspective on or theoretical framing for academic writing pedagogy (e.g. Turner, 2012), *not* a pedagogy (but see Lillis et al. 2015);

- Interest in practices surrounding academic texts (Lillis & Scott, 2007);

- Focus on the development of writer identity (Ivanič, 1998);

- Emphasis on students' prior experiences and trajectories (e.g, Paxton & Frith, 2014);

- Critique of "textual bias" (Flowerdew, 2019);

- *Transformative* rather than normative (Lillis & Scott, 2007;Lillis & Tuck, 2016).

Academic Literacies and ESP genre

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Some critiques of ESP from an AcLits perspective: (Too) much focus on identification of textual convention; students are trained to navigate different audience expectations, while gatekeepers do not have to adapt; normative not *transformative*.

- Lillis & Tuck (2016) call for more dialogue, see also Wingate & Tribble (2012); Flowerdew (2019), Paltridge, Starfield & Tardy (2016); Hathaway (2015)

Study 1: English for Specific Purposes and Academic Literacies

Dr Kathrin Kaufhold,
Stockholm University

McGrath, L. & Kaufhold, K. (2016). English for Specific Purposes and Academic Literacies: eclecticism in academic writing pedagogy. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 21(8), 933-947.

Aim:

Design a workshop for MA thesis writers in Anthropology at a **Swedish university**, drawing on insights from Academic Literacies and (ESP) genre approaches to academic writing development.

Workshop - writing the MA dissertation

- 8 hours of taught input;
- 13 Masters students in anthropology (L1 and L2, mostly L2);
- Students at varying stages in the research and writing process.

Anthropology

- Ethnography central to the discipline:
  - writing as "craft" (Narayan 2007)
- Genre features:
  - **Weaving**: combining empirical material, previous research and theory
  - **Story**: constructing/organising the field in the ethnographic description (Vora et al. 2012)
  - **Variation**: in textual patterns
  - **Voice and identity:** positioning the researcher in the field, reflecting on researcher role

The Course

Phase	Aims	Tasks
Introductory session	• Frame writing as a socially situated practice • Narrow down project idea through writing • Introduce meta-language for discussing rhetorical aspects of texts • Launch exploration of practices surrounding production of MA thesis	• Presentation of rhetorical triangle • Move analysis of abstracts • Critical discussion of conventions and variations observed • Reconstruction of the genre (students write own abstract)
Small group interviews with PhD students in Anthropology	• Develop knowledge of writing processes and wider rhetorical context • Shed light on "invisible discourse practices" (Badenhorst et al. 2015)	• Interview with PhD students (questions provided, but students encouraged to adapt according to own curiosity)
Workshop	• Integrate insights gained from textual analysis with students' prior experiences of writing, and discussions with the PhD students	• Elicitation of students' current genre knowledge; genre analysis of dissertations selected by students, contexualised through reference to the PhD interviews; • Visualisation of dissertation completion.

The PhD interviews

Questions	Rationale
What was your MA thesis about? How did you get to your topic? What makes a good research topic? As a reader, what do you look for in a good piece of anthropology writing? What do you expect to read? How did you achieve this in your thesis?	Probing topic conceptualisation *Process knowledge, subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, formal knowledge
What was the hardest bit about writing your thesis? How did you overcome it? What part was most enjoyable? Why? What were the stages of organising your field notes?	Eliciting insights into process of doing and writing ethnography *Process knowledge
Do you see yourself as an anthropologist? When did it happen? How did you know? Who is speaking when you write? Has it changed?	Affective dimensions of writing, and author and identity *Rhetorical knowledge?

Student responses

Variation, creativity and voice:

"The frames for writing are **less rigid** [...] it's both a privilege and difficult as it demands a lot from the individual in terms of **creativity and organisation** skills. This brings together the **variation and the person in the process**."

"...finding and using **your own voice as an author researcher**."

Formal, rhetorical and process knowledge:

"The writing **process** is much more **central** than I tend to think. The importance of weaving and trying to keep the theory, interviews and description on the same level. To give the impression that the field is speaking. **Writing demands a lot of planning and awareness of what is doing**."

Affective and motivational responses tied to process (and identity):

"I guess even though **you feel like a fake**, depressed or stressed, it's still possible to finish the thesis and **it might turn out good**, even though you don't feel like it yourself."

Where did this wander take me?

AcLits perspective helped **emphasise**:

- practices surrounding production of the text - e.g. discussions of fieldwork, rather than textual patterns;
- considerations of the affective dimension of writing and identity;
- power - student autonomy to select their own samples, pose their own questions in the interviews, and therefore to guide discussions in the workshop;
- awareness of variation and scope for creativity;
- attention to and possible integration of different facets of genre knowledge.

Was this approach *transformative?*

Part 3: Combining genre and metacognition in task design
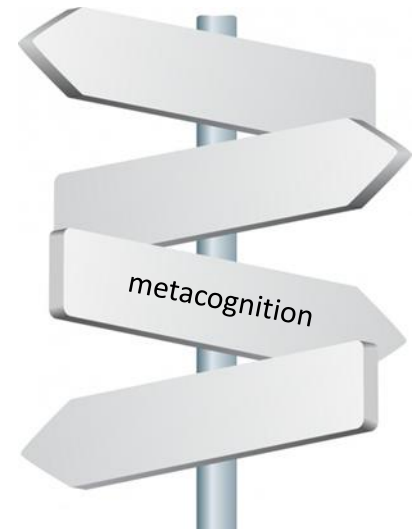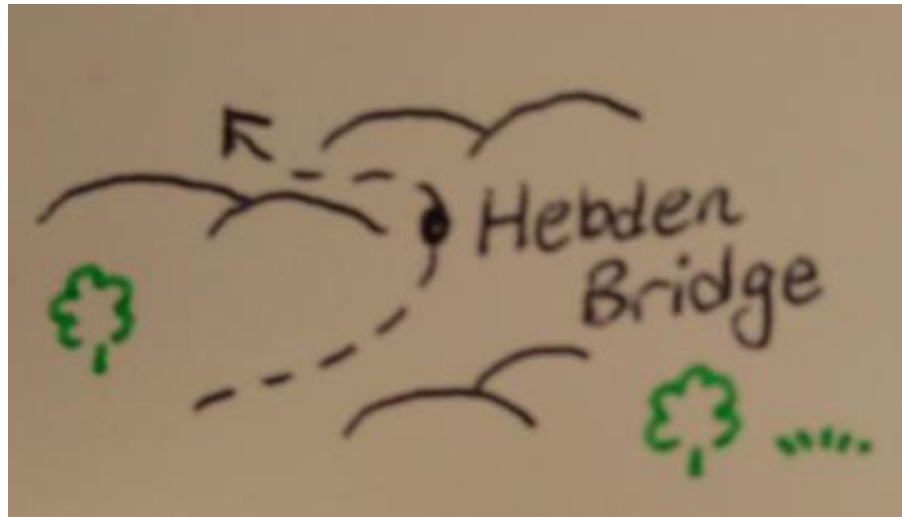
Subject lecturers and academic writing

Disciplinary literacy often constitutes **Tacit Knowledge**:

- "We know more than we can tell" (Polanyi 1966, p. 4)

Tacit knowledge is acquired by implicit learning (Eraut, 2000):

- Problem of awareness

- Problem of representation / communication

"Embedded, processual complexities of thinking, understanding, and acting in specific disciplinary contexts [...]are partly hidden even from academics themselves."

(Haggis, 2006, p. 530)

Study 2: Hidden Expectations

Dr Raffaella Negretti, Chalmers University of Technology

Karen Nicholls, Sheffield Hallam University

McGrath, L., Negretti, R. & Nicholls, K. (2019). Hidden expectations: scaffolding subject specialists' genre knowledge of the assignments they set. *Higher Education*

Aims:
To build subject specialists' genre knowledge;
To raise subject specialists' awareness of how genre knowledge has a bearing on their own pedagogical practice.
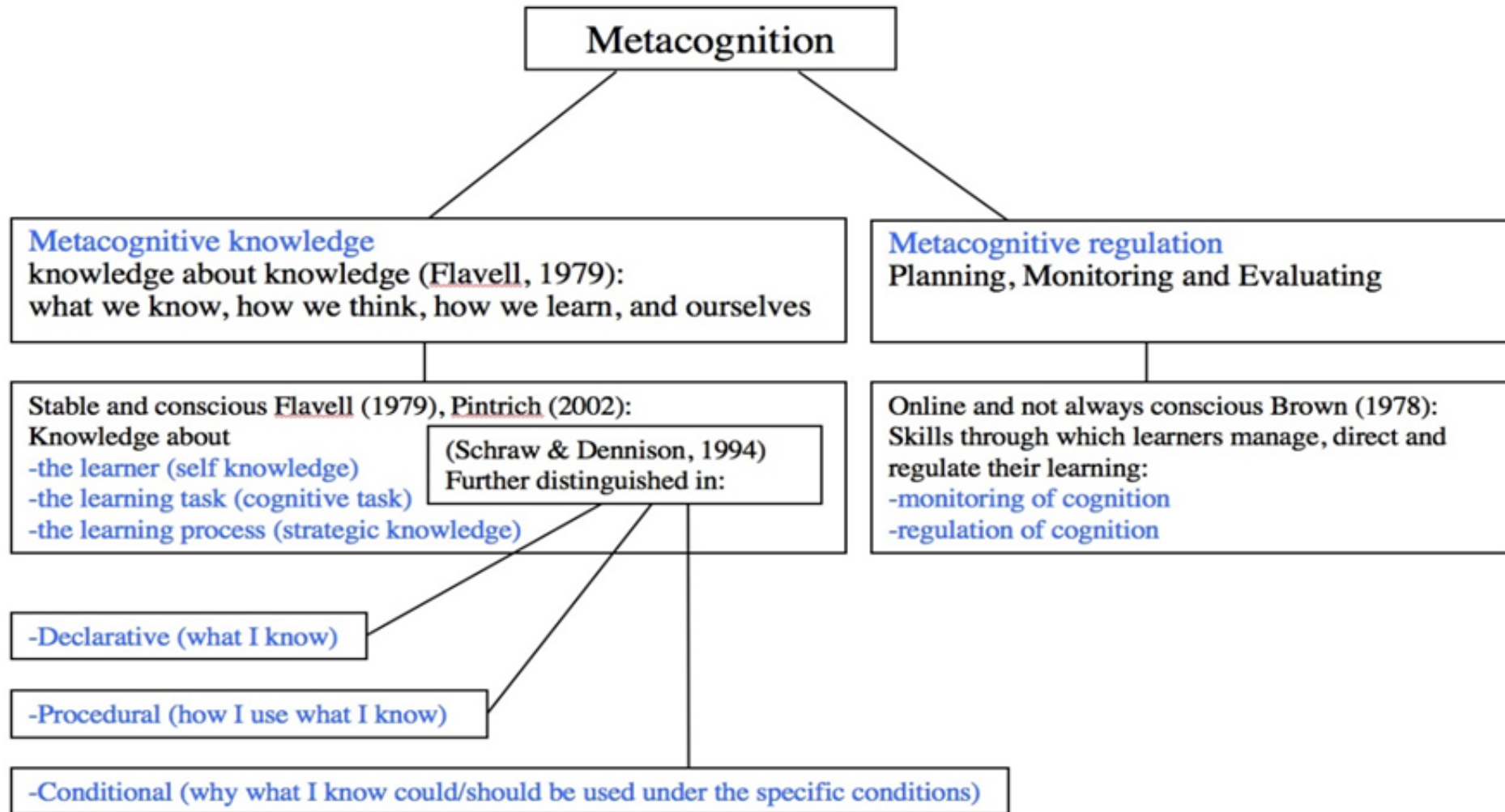
Metacognition theory: a schematic summary based on Flavell (1979), Brown (1978), Schraw & Dennison (1994), Pintrich (2002)

Negretti & McGrath, 2018

Promoting metacognitive genre knowledge

- 2-hour session with early-career lecturers taking a PGCERT program in Higher Education in the UK;

- 15 participants;

- 3 short tasks:

  1. mapping genre knowledge;

  2. evaluating current practice;

  3. reflecting on insights gained;

For the study, Tasks 1 and 3 were analysed (inductive coding)

Task 1: Activation and elicitation of relevant knowledge

Task 2: Integration of new knowledge into the learner's world

Task 3: Constructing higher-order knowledge and integrating/evaluating this knowledge
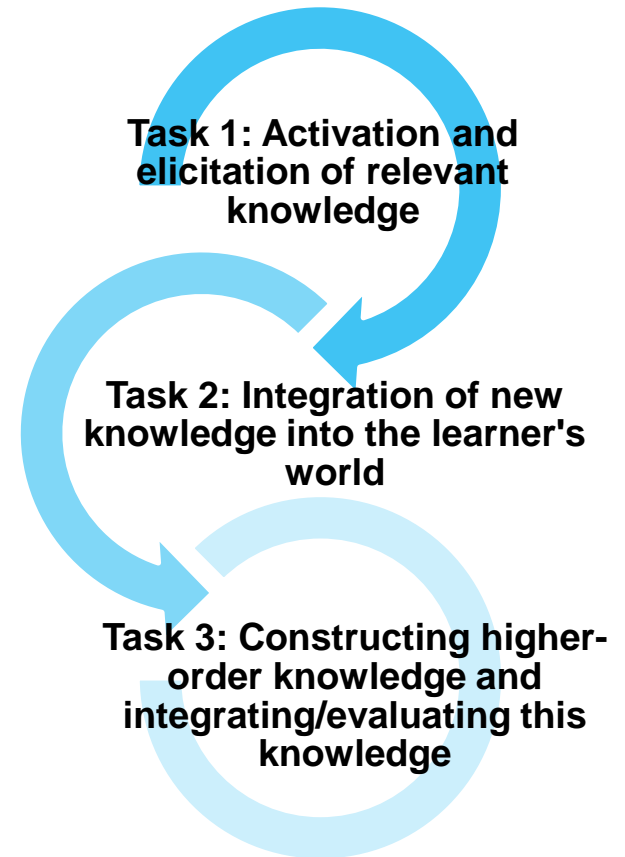
Adapted from Van de Kamp et al. (2015, 2016)

Task 1: Mapping genre knowledge

Using the assignment you brought to the session as a stimulus, think about the genre knowledge the student needed in order to successfully write this genre (content, rhetorical, formal, process). Make notes next to the relevant circle. Remember, the circle diagram is a heuristic, and in some cases, the knowledge may span multiple genre knowledge areas (20 mins).

Rhetorical knowledge

Formal knowledge

Subject-matter knowledge

Process knowledge
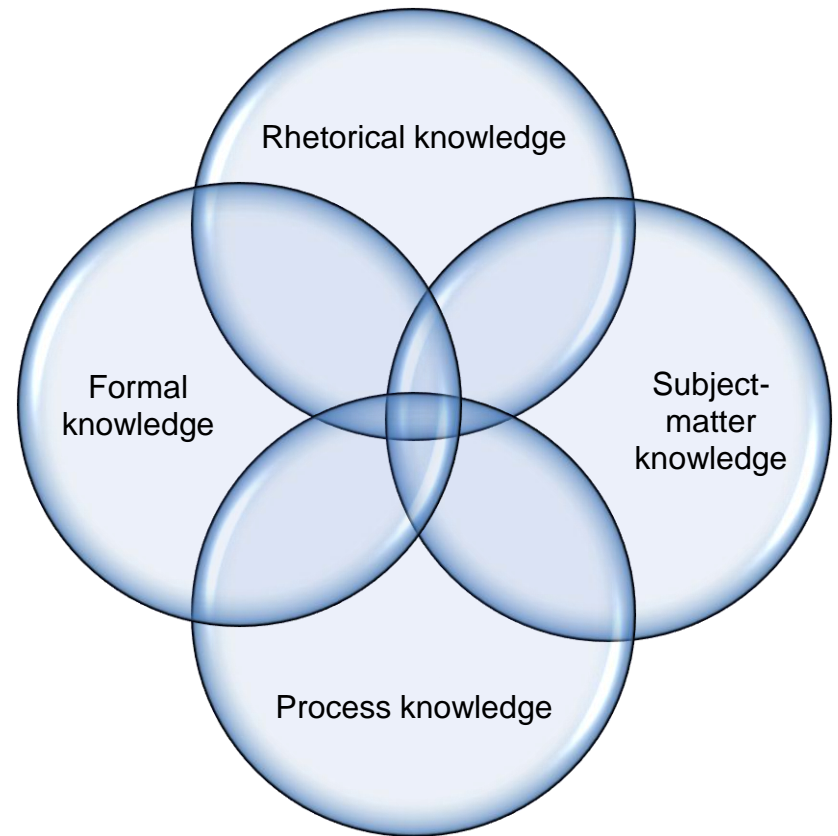
Task 1

P5

Assignment type:
Essay 3000 words
(2 parts)

Course: BA (Hons) Human Geography.
Module: Geographies of Everyday Life

1. Critical analysis / thinking
   Acknowledging counter arguments
   Critical analytical writing
   Developing an argument
   Reflexivity

2. Critical insight
   Reflection

1. APA referencing
   Complex sentences
   Structure — introduction
                Analysis
                Conclusion

2. Apa referencing
   Structure — reflection (evidence)
               analysis e.g photos
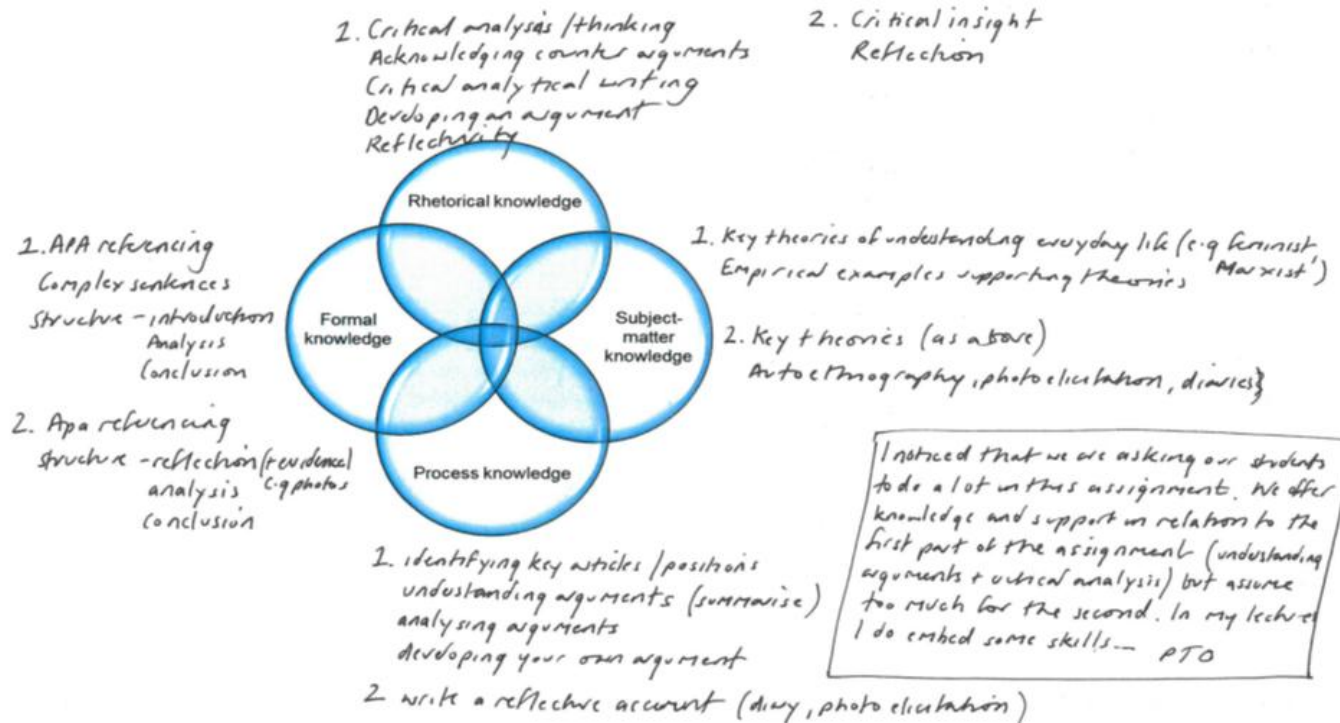   Conclusion

Rhetorical knowledge

Formal knowledge

Subject-matter knowledge

Process knowledge

1. Key theories of understanding everyday life (e.g feminist, Marxist)
   Empirical examples supporting theories

2. Key theories (as above)
   Autoethnography, photo elicitation, diaries}

1. identifying key articles / positions
   understanding arguments (summarise)
   analysing arguments
   developing your own argument

2 write a reflective account (diary, photo elicitation)

I noticed that we are asking our students to do a lot in this assignment. We offer knowledge and support in relation to the first part of the assignment (understanding arguments + critical analysis) but assume too much for the second. In my lecture I do embed some skills— PTO

Tardy, C. (2009). Building genre knowledge. West Lafayette: Parlor Press.

Task 2: Connecting to practice

Now look at your module handbook. To what extent are the different aspects of genre knowledge you have noted on the diagram taught/developed on the module? What knowledge is assumed to be in place? What is the balance between attention to content knowledge and the rhetorical, formal and process aspects of genre knowledge on the module? Discuss your observations with a partner (15 mins).

Task 3: Reflecting and evaluating

Reflect on the tasks and discussions this session. What insights have you gained ? What do these insights mean for your teaching and module leading practice? How might you adapt your practice ? Why? Please make some notes below. (20 minutes)

Task 1: Some observations

- The model was accepted;

- Subject-specific was dealt with in most detail;

- Rhetorical knowledge proved very difficult, but some discussion of audience and even values and epistemology;

- Formal knowledge focus was on APA referencing, some grammar and terminology, as well as structure, but this was very generic;

- Process knowledge entailed often a list of skills (e.g. identify, analyse....)

Discrepancy between what lecturers teach and what they expect students to produce

It also **made me very aware that we don't not explicitly cover formal knowledge**… particularly based on the assumption that **at level 6 we assume students should know most of this** knowledge, but also because, like rhetorical knowledge, **I sometimes assume that it implicit the way that I teach and activities** I set. (P10)

Biggest **insight gained is the amount of rhetorical knowledge that I expect them to have** about what we (and perhaps, to an extent, I – which is something I need to be aware of) expect and value in educational writing – **and it's not likely they would know all of this…** (P12)

Mapping - really enjoyed understanding the principle behind the genre knowledge theory. Trying to map it to my module was hard but informative. **I have realised that** due to the nature of my subject topic, **I only give the students subject-matter knowledge but nothing else**. (P16)

Meta-awareness of their own expectations

I really enjoyed doing this task. I found the theoretical diagram easier to understand than when I actually tried to complete the task myself based on my module assessment. **Maybe I am less clear on how I want them to complete the task/the formal knowledge than I am the outcome of what I expect to see. So this is an interesting reflection for me.** (P7)

…and **I realised that even if it was a really simple task, we did not/do not cover all the areas of knowledge, and I think it is important. For example, the process knowledge, we expect them to read outside of the class or make a draft but we do not ask them or we do not leave enough space for their own reflection.** However, in the assessment they need to do that. I don't mean to say that we do not let them reflect at all but we tend to give them/ tell them the way they should think, because we work towards the test. (P3)

Task 2 highlighted the huge gap between the instructions given to the students and our expectations for the for the module's assessment .(P2)

Meta-awareness of how to use the model to adapt their course to student needs

So **in terms of adapting my practice I think this model will give me awareness of where students are struggling (or where I am not communicating clearly the types of knowledge we need to see)** that will be very useful for assessment feedback and for session feedback as we go along. **I think it will help me frame the assessment to students better and provide them with a better visualisation of the learning outcomes.** It might also help us get them to think about where they need more guidance or where I could be more clear. (P7)

The mapping activity was useful in helping me **think about how my module is structured and how I might create better links between the introduction of new knowledge and building on existing knowledge.** (P10)

This is something that my colleagues and I often talk about - why don't students write well; why can't they reference etc etc but other than sending them to our Writing Centre we rarely so anything about this. **It is my intention to try to address this during class time by taking just a few minutes but I also want to address this with my colleagues in a broader way.** (P11)

Where did my wanders get me?

The design of the tasks:

- provided a clear, easy to grasp scaffold that lecturers from all disciplines seemed to be able to engage with;

- raised awareness of the role that writing has in these teachers' subject modules;

- raised awareness of their expectations, the way they engage (or don't) with academic writing in their teaching;

-provided an opportunity to think about how this awareness can be translated into changes to how they work with students.

A starting point for *transformation* perhaps?

Some final thoughts
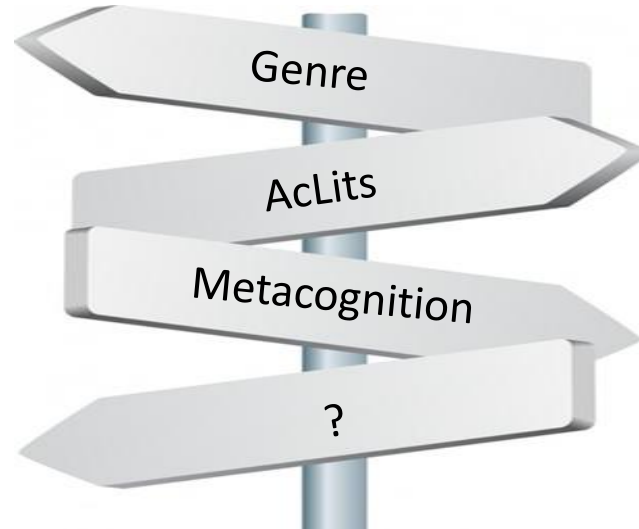
Genre

AcLits

Metacognition

?

As EAP practitioners, we benefit from exploring different theories, approaches, and frameworks to address pedagogical challenges we encounter in our everyday practice.

"Not all who wander are lost."
- J.R.R. Tolkien

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