

The Language Educator as Practitioner: Examining agency, identity and knowledge

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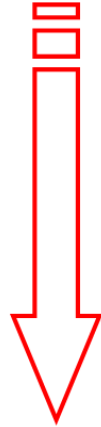
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What's at stake...

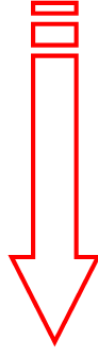
‘... there is increasing danger for practitioners that self-worth and social identity are at odds with one another with the attendant risk that practitioners withdraw “their active personification to become passive executors of minimalistic and enforceable expectation” (p. 304) – a performance rather than a performative expression of the self (p. 303).’

Ding and Bruce (2017)

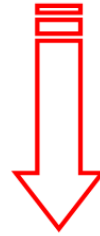
structure



neoliberalism



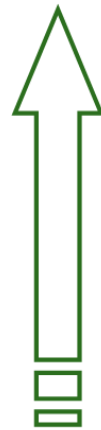
socialisation



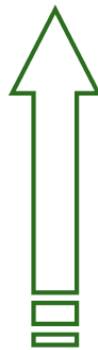
Identity



Knowledge



agency



reflexivity

Plan

- Structural forces that shape us as language educators
- Socialisation of/as practitioners
- Knowledge
- Identity and reflexivity

Structural forces that shape us as language educators: neoliberalism

“**Neoliberalism** is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that **proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.** The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. **Furthermore, if markets do not exist** (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) **then they must be created, by state action if necessary.** But beyond these tasks the state should not venture. State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit”

(Harvey 2005:2).

Neoliberalism

‘a state under the supervision of the market rather than a market supervised by the state’ (Foucault 2008:16)

The neoliberal academic: 'Our days are numbered – literally'

- Entrepreneurial (never ending ...'self-development' 'self-promotion')
- 'the re-invention of professionals themselves as units of resource whose performance and productivity must constantly be audited so that it can be enhanced' (Shore & Wright 1999: 559)
- Performativity 'skills of presentation and of inflation, making the most of ourselves, making a spectacle of ourselves. We become transparent but empty, unrecognisable to ourselves' (Ball, 2012)
- Ontological and professional insecurity (why are we doing this?)
- Discourse of metrics, rankings, outputs, impact, generating profits, grant capture, world-class, excellence (I note the irony!) ...

The neoliberal student: 'human capital'

- Consumer of education
- Instrumental
- Student as personification of market forces
- Aspirational social capital/status
- Producers and consumers of economic wealth
- Avoiding risks, experimentation, intellectual challenges
- Conservative
- Seekers of satisfaction, experience, employment and useful transferable skills

Socialisation/Habitus and Structure

Socialisation refers to:

The way in which the outer, the disciplinary matrix, its networks and canons, represented within as a structuring of consciousness and of self, and this is the basis of competence, of the capacity to participate, produce and contribute. ***The key relationship, then, is between the manner in which knowledge has developed within an intellectual field and the manner in which individuals become members of fields***, of how, as Bourdieu puts it, the scientist becomes the scientific field 'made flesh'.

(Moore, 2009, p. 148)

Socialisation of practitioners

It is mainly through mastery of propositional knowledge that novices gain access to and get admitted into their respective discourse communities. Without knowing the language of the community (i.e., propositional or declarative knowledge), one would be left out of any discussion which might result in the development of the self, since “there is no essential unsocialized way of thinking that can be depended upon as the basis for critical reflection” (Fendler, 2003, p. 20). **If novices to the profession are not familiar with the field’s theoretical knowledge, they will lose the chance of developing their full potentials** (Hedgcock, 2002).

Akbari, 2007, p. 203.

Socialisation of practitioners...

- Unlike more established and traditional professions there is little to no prior socialisation.
- only a very weak link between how knowledge has developed within EAP/MFL and the ways in which individuals become members of the field
- most often takes place *in situ* and often *ad hoc*
- becoming a practitioner only begins *after* entering the field

Socialisation and cultural capital...

‘[i]ndividuals will possess cultural capital in proportion to the status of their specialized field in the social space and their position within their specialized field’

Moore, 2009, p. 150.

‘Given that most academic fields and the most powerful professions require a considerable number of years of specialised study and socialisation before entry, in contrast to entry to EAP [MFL??] for practitioners, it is less than surprising that practitioners have little cultural capital within academia.’

Ding and Bruce, 2017

Developing cultural capital

‘Development of practitioners, then, is also about enhancing the cultural capital and status of practitioners because without cultural capital practitioner agency, recognition, identity and roles in contributing to the university are quite restricted. Development of practitioners is not just about self-development or professional development it is also about developing the profession and enabling the profession to exert greater influence within academia: development is about agency and structure.’

Ding and Bruce (2017)

Reflexivity & Agency

Reflexivity is **not**:

narcissistic reflexivity (Bourdieu, 2000) or *hermeneutic narcissism* (Maton, 2003) where:

‘It becomes less and less important to know very much (or to be able to teach very much) because simply knowing who you are (and the Other who you are not) is sufficient’ (Moore, 2009, p. 59)

Reflexivity

For Archer, the self is a causal agent – a “project maker” (Archer 2003, p. 105) - and **who we are is a “matter of what we care about most and the commitments we make accordingly”** (p. 120). We define our commitments through repeated reflexive internal conversations, specifically by:

‘[engaging] in intense questioning about the terms and conditions of endorsing any of these scenarios [life projects], which it has already deemed worthwhile, with the aim of determining whether or not she has the wherewithal to see through the one she is most drawn.’ (Archer, 2000, p. 103)

Reflexivity – discernment – deliberation - dedication

We are existentially driven, through reflexive internal conversations to define and commit to what we care about the most. This is what gives each of us a sense of authenticity and unique personal identity: we are what we care about and what we commit ourselves to in *objective* circumstances not of our own choosing.

EAP Practitioners as Social & Corporate Agents

actors find “a role in which they feel they can invest themselves, such that the accompanying social identity is expressive of who they are as persons in society” (ibid). There is a further nuance that Archer specifies and that is of **corporate agency**:

Its typical powers are capacities for articulating shared interests, organising for collective action, generating social movements and exercising corporate influence in decision-making. (p. 266)

They bring to it [the role] or them [the roles] their singular manner of personifying it or them and this, in turn, has consequences over time. What it does creatively is to introduce a continuous stream of unscripted performances, which also over time can cumulatively transform role expectations. These creative acts are the transformations of society's very normativity, which is most clearly spelt out in the norms attaching to specific roles. (Archer, 2000, p. 296)

Knowledge

Maton (2003) provides a reminder that there is epistemic capital in research and, we would argue, development and scholarship:

‘actors within the intellectual field engage in strategies aimed at maximising not merely resources and status but also epistemic profits, that is, better knowledge of the world’. (p. 62)

Identity, agency and reflexivity

Who we are is a 'matter of what we care about most and the commitments we make accordingly' (Archer, 2003: 120)

The only way that this tension between personal aspirations and social expectation can be resolved is by practical action.

Archer, 2003:123.

Self-transformation entails projects which involve self-modification but which are also expressions of social critique and quests for social transformation.

Archer 2003: 128.

self

it is imperative that we know our powers, our liabilities, our objective position in the world, our resources and our values. In short we can critique our social ontologies and can attempt to change them.

Association & Solidarity

Corporate agency is the *we* of collective action whose members share “its goals and organisation” (p. 267). The *we* of corporate agency is a “step towards social transformation” (p. 267). The power of corporate agents is the:

very special punch that they pack as far as systematic stability and change are concerned. Only those who are aware of what they want, can articulate it to themselves and others, and have organised in order to obtain it, can engage in concerted action to reshape or retain the structural and/or cultural features in question. (p. 265)

Associations –
often poor at public policy, often apolitical

The professional association exists to advance the standing of the members of the occupation or profession by setting educational and other standards governing the profession, advocating for favourable public and private policies, aiding members in their professional development, and advancing professional practice through research and information dissemination. (Lamb, 2012, p. 289)

Scholarship.... Simple heuristic

We develop a scholarship of teaching when our work as teachers becomes public, peer-reviewed and critiqued. And exchanged with members of our professional communities so they, in turn, can build on our work.

Shulman, 2000:49.

[T]he core values of professional communities revolve around the expectation that we do not keep secrets, whether of discovery or of grounded doubt.

Schulman, 2000:50.

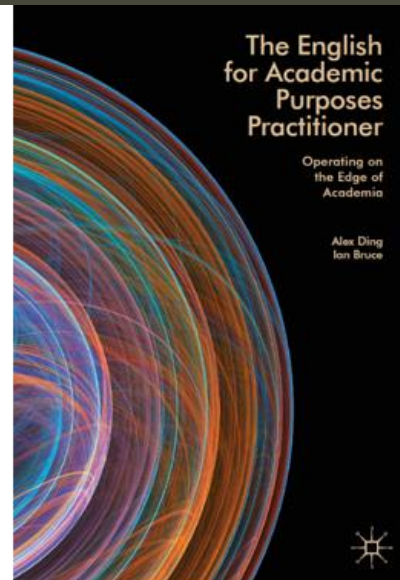
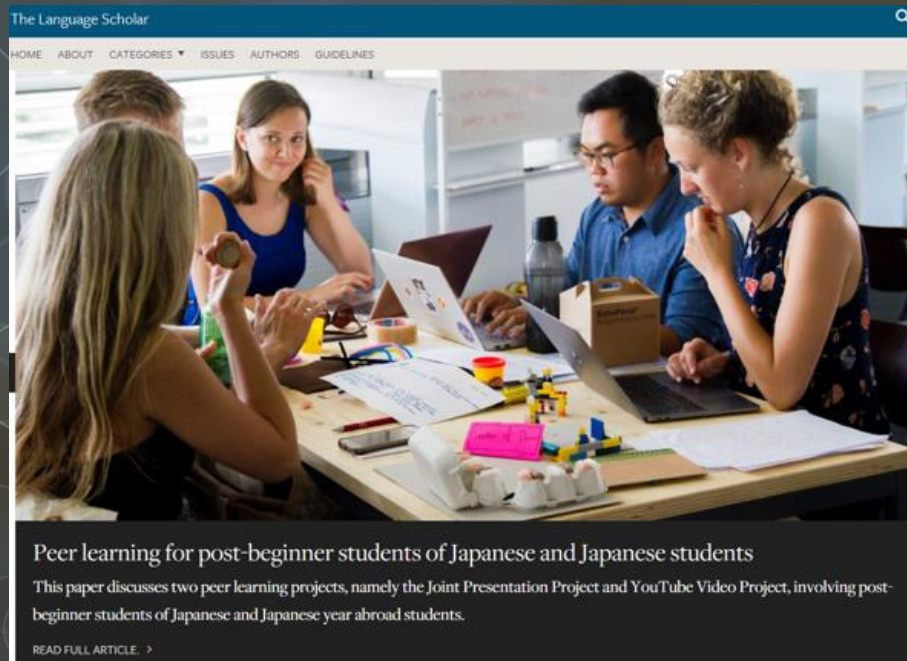
Scholarship

withdrawing from SoTL or non-engagement with SoTL carries risks....

by withholding contributions to scholarship we are potentially limiting our own agency, limiting our ability to influence structural change and accepting of changes and practices defined and decided by others.

Scholarship

Scholarship is, in a way, an invitation – a challenge - to reconsider our identity as language educators: it suggests an identity that expands into areas often occluded in the past to one that is more visible, more vocal, making contributions to professional knowledge, exerting influence, shaping practices and policies, engaging with students differently and accumulating social and epistemic capital and recognition



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Numerous collaborations, networks and dialogues ...

UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTION OF LANGUAGE, DISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE COMMUNICATION AND IDENTITY
Executive Summary

Bee Bond



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