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Developing Contexts of Scholarship

Edited by Jeanne Godfrey and Alexander Ding

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The Language Scholar is an open access and peer-reviewed journal. Its main objective is to provide a platform to promote the scholarship of learning and teaching languages.

Contributions are welcome from practitioners, researchers and students who are involved in language education. Areas of particular interest to this Journal are theories and practices for language teaching and education, including language teaching approaches and methodologies, intercultural communication, the psychology of language learning, research-led teaching, student-led practices, communicative strategies and experimental teaching.

The Language Scholar is hosted by the Centre for Excellence in Language Teaching within the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies at the University of Leeds. It considers international contributions in multimedia formats, in and about any language (including ancient languages). It aims to provide a space for the development of scholarship in language education, and to provide a platform for pieces which highlight the potential of multimodality to enhance communication, including a supportive and developmental approach to peer review.

Alongside the annual printed issue, the Language Scholar's digital space hosts and showcases contributions, facilitating the sharing and exchange of ideas. Submissions can be sent to the journal at any time, although there will be deadlines announced for specific printed issues.

If you would like to get in touch or submit a piece, you can contact us on the journal's email: **languagescholar@leeds.ac.uk** or Tweet us at **@LangScholar.**

Contents

Editorial

The Language Scholar Special Issue: Developing Contexts of Scholarship

Jeanne Godfrey

Welcome to this special issue of the Language Scholar. Creating it has been a team effort of course, and my thanks go to all the contributing authors, our reviewers and our editorial team, particularly our journal managers Alba del Pozo García and Denise de Pauw.

The articles in this issue all address an under-discussed aspect of language teaching and learning scholarship – the actual contexts within which such work does or doesn't happen. The pieces here provide critique, evidence and (sometimes uncomfortable) insights regarding practitioners' current contexts, and suggest concrete ways forward, both as individual practitioners and as a community. The issue is also special in that it purposely exhibits scholarship that is innovative and diverse in nature and form, while maintaining academic rigour and forwarding debate. My final and repeated thanks go to the scholars within our community who talk to us here.

This issue begins with a thought-piece by Alex Ding, Co-Editor of the journal and Professor of English for Academic Purposes, in which he reflects on the journal's manifesto and outlines some of his concerns around scholarship that have emerged since its publication in 2018. I think Alex's piece provides a thought-provoking springboard from which to dive into the rest of the scholarship presented here.

The second article takes the form of a critical reflection, in which González and Abbatelli examine their experience of developing and running a pedagogy reading group, with the aim of forwarding and supporting scholarship in their school. This piece is followed by a critical, co-constructed autoethnography in which Lam and Leung discuss their different teaching and scholarship journeys and in doing so, challenge our perceptions of a research/teaching binary. Our fourth article is an autoethnographic narrative. Reschenhofer discusses the possibilities for, and benefits of, creating a context that allows teachers on fixed-term contracts on an English for Academic Purposes pre-sessional course to engage in scholarship. In the fifth piece, Driscoll, Hardman and Playfair use a collaborative autoethnographic methodology to reflect on the context within which they co-

constructed practitioner development forums, discussing its limitations and relevance for other scholarship contexts.

In their autoethnography, Moyetta and Muñoz reflect on their national, institutional and disciplinary contexts and contribute to the debates around the status and identity of EAP practitioners as scholars. In the seventh piece, Timothy Chapman reflects on his scholarship which has taken the form of co-authoring a book. He examines the challenges and affordance of collaborative writing, focusing on issues such as finding and negotiating authorial voice, managing workloads, gaining confidence as a writer-practitioner and the demands of the publication process. Next comes a paper by Pocock and Haines, in which they evidence and examine their journey of scholarship that is the building of a context *for* scholarship. The authors present data that reveal issues of becoming, being, and belonging within the teacher-researcher community they have helped develop and discuss implications of their findings for future (and other) practitioner research scholarship projects. In the ninth and final article in this issue, Coderch discusses her experience as a scholar in a university foreign language department and compares this with the descriptions of SoTL in the literature. She concludes her paper by proposing concrete actions needed if we are to ‘reclaim’ scholarship.

Scholarship and (dis)Illusio: Rereading the Language Scholar Manifesto

Alex Ding

Language Centre, University of Leeds

Six years ago I drafted a manifesto for the Language Scholar. It was approved and co-signed by the editorial board and published in December 2018 in the Language Scholar. The purpose of this short thought-piece is partly to reflect on the manifesto, why I wrote it, and stimulated by rereading it, why a degree of disillusionment although dangerous is both necessary and productive.

I was appointed to lead scholarship in the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies (LCS) and the Language Centre (LC) at the University of Leeds in 2015. Despite strong support from leadership within LCS and LC, it is fair to say that the promotion of scholarship was not greeted with universal approval from colleagues. Reactions ranged from enthusiasm and curiosity to indifference and suspicion as well as hostility. Having initiated the creation of the Language Scholar, I used it as a platform to publish a manifesto for scholarship. The motivation for writing the manifesto was in part, and only in small part, to confront, challenge and provoke those colleagues who expressed hostility or confusion around scholarship. I was also under pressure to define scholarship from colleagues. To much frustration I resisted this. I resisted partly because research resists a simple, neat definition and epistemological virtues are not universally shared across all disciplines and indeed within disciplines. My reasoning was why demand of scholarship something that isn't of research? Still, some parameters and contours of scholarship needed to be sketched. The manifesto attempted to do that.

Additionally, the university was only just beginning to grapple with scholarship as a legitimate and recognised form of contribution to knowledge and student education and it seemed to me that, rather than produce a restrictive and detailed definition of scholarship (and prematurely foreclosing forms of scholarship in doing so), definitions of scholarship should emerge, over time, through practices of scholarship. Describing rather than prescribing scholarship practices would allow a more generous and meaningful definition to emerge.

A major motivation for the manifesto was driven by a desire to distinguish scholarship from research. At the time (and even more so now) conflating research with scholarship, I felt, would be disastrous for practitioners. The social field(s) in which language educators and researchers operate lend significantly greater capitals (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) to researchers than educators. This lends them greater power and legitimacy. The motivations, rewards and distinctions available to researchers (as well as the significant constraints associated with this) mean that their practices are shaped by metrics of all sorts, as well as grants, prestige, competition, and the struggle for distinction. My view was that participating in this particular game would only lead to language educators being dominated and further marginalised. It also seemed perverse to attempt to play a game that many researchers derided themselves (even as some of them profited handsomely from it). This view was bolstered by a growing concern and realisation that the very persistent and very stale trope of the 'research-practice gap' in research articles and books was achieving little to nothing to redress this so-called gap. In fact, the suspicion occurred to me on more than one occasion (and perhaps unfairly in some cases) that the maintenance of this gap was necessary for the careers of these researchers. There appeared to be a parasitical relationship between researchers of practitioners and practitioners. Researchers appearing to need practitioners for data to then be written up, analysed and presented on their behalf. Practitioners objectified, dissected and discussed.

Furthermore, the pedagogical implications attached to research articles (often reading as an afterthought) sometimes revealed an alarming degree of ignorance about language practices, students and their teachers. More broadly, the field of applied linguistics reveals a carousel of claims to innovation, various turns, and new subfields and specialisms and concerns. It is an increasingly fragmented and incoherent field, making the discernment of valuable contributions to the field increasingly difficult. I felt that scholarship *for and by* practitioners could be a powerful means of answering back and holding research colleagues to account. It was also an important opportunity to ground scholarship in a different and distinct ethos. To create an illusio, i.e. our commitment to participating in a field and our investment in its stakes. In essence what makes a game worth playing and committing to. Primary in my thoughts was that scholarship should be grounded in understanding and developing scholarship *for* rather than *about* language education entailing a focus on praxis, practices, politics and policies that impact students, language education and language educators, all underpinned by a (contestable) ethics that strives to reduce the gap form the real to the ideal for all in universities. To orientate scholarship to what is meaningful for us as a community.

This has important consequences. Firstly, it requires us, an imperative of sorts, to remain independent and potentially critical of university policies and practices around student education as well as dominant ideas in language education. Through scholarship, rather than opinion or authority, we can and should make a case if we have evidence (and this can come in many forms) that practices are detrimental to us and/or education. This position could be seen as negative, critical or uncooperative. And it certainly carries some perceived risks for those exposing doubts or criticisms. Yet, the alternative is simply to submit or possibly, at best, subvert. Critique should be seen and conducted as a sincere endeavour to improve or change practices. Fear should be mitigated by taking the time, care and effort to produce scholarship that provides arguments and evidence that helps rectify policies and practices or proposes different ones.
The manifesto was, in this sense, a means of encouraging scholarship that is meaningful and potentially transformational. I had hoped that the manifesto would inspire at least some colleagues and outline a common purpose. A rallying call of what scholarship could be and could achieve. More powerful and full of potential than a restricted and restrictive definition of scholarship.

University interest in scholarship resulted in the creation of the Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence, the faculty-wide Pedagogical Research in the Arts and the school-wide Centre for Excellence in Language Teaching. Alongside this, new opportunities for recognition, rewards, and promotion emerged at around the same time as the Manifesto. This welcome shift in attention to scholarship and ways of recognising and rewarding scholarship, especially through promotions, was accompanied by other structures, such as time allocated to scholarship, and these had a much more profound and material impact than the manifesto in galvanising colleagues. Scholarship still solicits concern and occasional hostility but more marginally so. Scholarship at Leeds is now part of the accepted practices of language educators.

However, as with any field with rewards and recognition, practices are at least partly shaped by what is at stake and what profits and distinction can be accrued from scholarship. This has resulted in a proliferation of scholarship at Leeds. Scholarship, in theory, is not constrained by metrics to measure citations, impact and prestigious publications. This still leaves the problem of how to adjudicate the quality of scholarship. In theory, on promotion forms and other applications for rewards and recognition, all scholarship publications look alike with little to guide whether a contribution has value. The feat of publishing – as in research – tends to be celebrated rather than what its contribution might be to knowledge and practices. This can encourage publishing for its own sake and rewards rather than think of publishing as a stage in a long-term process pressing an idea or critique for educational change. Publishing in itself risks becoming the most important marker of status and distinction. Scholarship, like research, can be highly performative – and devoid of meaning. We have no system for evaluating scholarship. University policies around student education tend to shape what types of scholarship are valued and supported leaving a more marginal space and resources for scholarship that is critical or not aligned with university-wide objectives. This can encourage conformity rather than (useful) transgressions. The plethora of student education initiatives has enabled many language educators to participate in large-scale initiatives across the university, yet the suspicion remains that novelty sometimes trumps cumulative knowledge-building in the search for educational solutions. Because of the way rewards are structured, including promotion, they tend to accentuate individual achievement. Individuals should, of course, be rewarded and recognised but there is a risk that the collegial and collaborative fabric of professional life can be undone (or instrumentalised) through individual ambition. The field of research is replete with unhealthy competition and scholarship risks the same fate.

In the years that followed the publication of the manifesto, Leeds, like many universities, largely but not uniquely due to neoliberal pressures to satisfy student consumers and metrics such as the TEF, invested in scholarship. The paragraphs above have outlined just some of my (many) concerns (which can be qualified as a form of disillusionment) regarding practices around scholarship. The manifesto is saturated with pathos, it is a call or appeal for one version of an ideal for scholarship. A vision that might unite us. That it has failed in some ways is no surprise to me. What is needed in a reflexive, socio-analysis of scholarship (there are hints of elements of what that might look in this piece) to fully understand the conditions and practices of knowledge production in language education scholarship. Objectifying these conditions and practices will invariably break the illusio and risks disillusionment. But seeing things as they really are is the first stage of making them better – and suggests that an ethics of scholarship might emerge. The manifesto remains a useful reminder of what scholarship could be and could achieve.

A Roadmap towards Cultivating a SoTL Community of Practice

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ABSTRACT

Our paper is a reflection on the experience of two years of developing and supporting contexts of scholarship. The paper will specifically focus on the organization of a pedagogy reading group and on considerations about the development of scholarship for teaching-focussed colleagues which arose in a School-wide meeting on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).

The reflection will be a way to take stock on the experience of the reading group stressing the opportunities and positive outcomes stemmed by it, while also pinpointing critical aspects around participation and the complexity to apply some of the readings' pedagogic principles within the constraints of university policy.

The paper will also highlight unresolved issues around diversity, workloads, limited awareness of SoTL and temporary contracts that impact on the development of the teaching scholarship. Finally, it will suggest ways forward to keep developing SoTL and make it more visible and relevant at School and university level.

KEYWORDS: scholarship of teaching and learning, community of practice, reading group, collaboration, professional development

INTRODUCTION

When we both started our journey as co-leads of Teaching and Learning in our department, one of our main priorities was the enhancement of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and the provision of support to teaching staff, including PhD students who teach. The reasons for this are numerous. First of all, this coincided with some of the goals of our university's education strategy, which has a strong focus on disciplinary and teaching excellence, as well as excellence in pedagogy. In order to achieve such goals, the strategy document states that it is necessary to engage in 'discipline-related scholarship and peer exchange for developing best practice in teaching and learning nationally and internationally' (Warwick University, 2019). Consequently, both scholarship and SoTL are crucial requirements for academic career development and in the promotion criteria for staff with teaching focussed contracts. This is not surprising given that the concept of SoTL has been increasingly used as a tool to evidence excellence in teaching (Kreber, 2002; McEwan, 2022).

However, despite this increased relevance of the field, it still tends to be forgotten or absent in many cases from workloads and progress review discussions, or simply poorly understood. Therefore, we were seeking to shift the focus and make SoTL more present and visible across our department, recognising in this way, much of the work already done by colleagues in teaching focused contracts. In so doing, we were ultimately keen on exploring the power of SoTL in breaking down some sectional and hierarchical barriers by bringing together colleagues from the different sections that form our School of Modern Languages and Cultures (this includes French Studies, German Studies, Hispanic Studies, Italian Studies, the Language Centre, and Translation Studies). Thus, our aim here is to share our roadmap for the enhancement of SoTL in our department. By discussing our priorities and goals, as well as reflecting on our challenges and outcomes so far, we hope to encourage and assist academic staff in similar departmental teaching and learning roles who are considering ways of enhancing and supporting SoTL research and development.

CONTEXT AND INSPIRATION

There has been increasing institutional support towards scholarship, SoTL and teaching focussed staff in the past few years, thanks to the intense work of different groups across our university such as the Warwick International Higher Education Academy (WIHEA), an institutional academy of educators for staff and students engaged in the advancement of learning and teaching excellence. In particular, one of its many learning circles, the Teaching Recognition and Reward group, has focused on achieving parity of research and teaching, among many other initiatives. Similarly, the Academic Development Centre has dedicated many events and resources to support SoTL across the institution, particularly their 'Cultivate' programme, an open access series of events and resources to support learning, teaching, and assessment.

Beyond our institution, we have found inspiration in the work carried out by Sascha Stollhans and Oranna Speicher, particularly their panel entitled 'Locating Modern Languages in Higher Education institutions: potential for collaboration and joint pedagogical research' at the conference 'Where are we now? The Location of Modern Languages and Cultures', which took place in Durham University in April 2023. The rich discussions and exchange of ideas served as a catalyst for some of the initiatives we explore here. Finally, we also need to acknowledge *The Language Scholar* and their 'Manifesto for the Scholarship of Language Teaching and Learning' (Ding et al., 2018). All these initiatives made us aware that more SoTL support and engagement were needed locally, at a micro level: how can we introduce and cultivate sustainable SoTL in our disciplinary community?

We first noticed that, while many of the teaching-focused staff were already involved in SoTL either by 'reflecting critically on practice; using ideas from the literature or contributing to the literature' (Baume and Popovic, 2016, p.6), this was mainly done in isolation, without much visibility or support. SoTL research tends to be a solo act, conducted by an individual educator. However, Shulman (2004) argues that SoTL should rather be viewed as a collaborative activity or as a communal property, where we engage with others to improve our teaching as well as students learning and experience.

Scholars have stressed the potential power of communities engaged in SoTL and the paramount role of departments in building capacity and establishing support structures (Felten, 2013; Fanghanel et al., 2015; Healey and Matthews, 2017; Bailey et al., 2022). We therefore sought to create a SoTL community of practice, understood as a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, 1998, p.73). This community would encourage collaboration and reduce isolation, providing a supportive atmosphere or environment for these activities, following the model of Faculty Learning Communities (FLC) developed by Cox (2003). Given that SoTL is very much about thinking, talking, reading, and writing about our teaching practices, we decided to focus on the three first actions as a starting point.

READING, THINKING, AND TALKING TOGETHER: A PEDAGOGY READING CLUB

The first initiative taken to develop a community of practice was the foundation of a reading group. We started it in the academic year 2022-23 and the reading group has been running now for the second academic year, reaching seven meetings in total. The pedagogy reading group has been open to all colleagues in the SMLC and Language Centre, including PhD students who were teaching assistants who rarely engage with SoTL 'even if they have substantial teaching assistant responsibilities, as emphasis is placed on disciplinary knowledge' (Webb and Tierney, 2019, p.614). The choice of the readings has been focused on the latest debates in pedagogy and aligned to the above-mentioned Warwick priorities and education strategy (e.g. inclusion, internationalisation, curriculum development and assessment). The readings were all articles or book chapters and were suggested by us as organisers and colleagues alike. They covered the following topics: decolonising modern languages (D'Argenio and Chant, 2021; Ford and Santos, 2022); differences in higher education pedagogy (Burke, 2017); ethnography and the YA (Dasli and Sangster, 2021); trigger warnings (Inside Highered Ed, 2014); authentic assessment (McArthur, 2022); education to sustainable development (De La Fuente, 2022); critical pedagogy (Seal and Smith, 2021). The aim of the reading group was twofold. The first was to support professional development and initiate conversations around current themes in pedagogy of teaching and learning that could lead to small teaching changes, that is, changes occurring in 'how we design our courses, conduct our classrooms and communicate with our students' (Lang, 2021, p.5). The second was to help colleagues in view of applying for promotion and Advance HE fellowships to engage with scholarship.

In 2022-23 the reading group took place exclusively online on MS Teams on Wednesday and Friday afternoons at different times to let colleagues with different teaching schedules be able to participate. In 2023-24 we have been holding hybrid meetings in order to foster more community building, but without excluding colleagues who could not be on campus. Information about date and time of the appointments and the readings were circulated on the Moodle Teaching and Learning page roughly three weeks in advance. The readings were stored in that same page in a specific folder so they could be available also after the reading group. The average of attendees was 7-8 each session.

The meetings were usually introduced by a short reflection made by one of us organisers, who during the following discussion acted as a moderator, and then open to everyone's contribution. Similarly to Cave and Clandinin (2007), we only assigned the articles as pre-session readings and did not provide in advance guiding questions, which seems to be the most common modality in the literature available on book clubs as professional development (Coria-Navi and Moncrieff; Cooper, 2018; Fitzgerlad and Carpendale, 2022; Landry, Richard and Layou, 2022). As an informal occasion for professional development, we preferred not to add the pressure of any additional preparation and allow members to freely 'interweave their personal interpretations of the text' (Grenier et al., 2022, p.493). The readings provided an opportunity to reflect on teaching practices and 'frequently included stories and reflections from the group members' experiences, and often resulted in the development of useful practical strategies that emerged from the conversations' (Cave and Clandinin, 2007, p.366-67). Several of the following reflections on this reading group experience will resonate with the findings of Coria-Navi and Moncrieff (2018), however one of the aims of this paper is also to analyse the challenges that emerged from the reading group.

Among the positive outcomes, there is without any doubt community building. The reading group appeared to be the only space in SMLC where colleagues could discuss pedagogy without being constrained by university policies and regulations. Although we hold regular cross-school teaching and learning meetings, they are focused on language teaching and therefore involve only a limited number of colleagues. In addition to this, the teaching and learning meetings increasingly revolve around practicalities such as organising exams or providing common solutions across sections to issues arising from everyday teaching, in response to students' requests or university policy changes. Without diminishing the importance of such meetings, they are seldom devoted to reflecting on pedagogy and on teaching and learning innovations. Contrary to what Coria-Navi and Moncrieff (2018) state for their specific case, there is an abundance of opportunities for professional development at the University of Warwick organised by the Academic Development Centre, as already mentioned. However, due to the workload and the teaching timetable it might be difficult for some colleagues to stay updated with the workshops offered, which at times happen to take place during teaching hours. Furthermore, the opportunities offered by the ACD target academics from every faculty, while the reading group dealt with general pedagogic themes offering a venue for reflection on those from the modern languages' perspective. The reading group was also a non-hierarchical space to which everyone was invited. Not only did PhD students participate in a couple of meetings, but so did non-academic staff. Usually, language meetings are only attended by permanent or temporary staff, but not by PhD teaching assistants because attendance at meetings is not part of their contract.

Participation in our reading group allowed colleagues to keep themselves abreast of pedagogic literature and debates around teaching and learning in higher education, as well as university strategic priorities. Colleagues who decided to take part in the reading group 'forced' themselves to read pedagogic literature 'because of their responsibility to the group for participating in the discussion' (Coria-Navi and Moncrieff, 2018, p.6) notwithstanding the increasing workload, administrative tasks, and the consequent lack of time to reflect about teaching. Becoming familiar with new approaches to teaching and learning led some colleagues to small teaching changes. However, it is also important to focus on the challenges that running the reading group posed, as identifying them helps in pinpointing critical aspects of supporting the development of SoTL. The first is the fact that participation to the reading group was very gendered, namely no male colleague attended any meeting. This is primarily due to a structural imbalance, as the majority of colleagues on a teaching-focussed contract are women (39 women vs 10 men), and therefore more involved in SoTL meetings and events. The presence of female colleagues on research contracts was a positive sign against the differentiation among staff on research and teaching contracts. It would be interesting to have more extensive data related to gender around the participation in pedagogical reading groups. On a very small scale, our experience confirms the disproportionate representation of women in SoTL self-selected activities (McKinney and Chick, 2010, p.5).

Despite the presence of colleagues on a research contract, they were overall a minority. Their highest participation was in the sessions about trigger warnings and critical pedagogy. The reading group might have been perhaps interpreted more as an event about language teaching pedagogy, and this might be due to the fact that the roles of Director and Deputy Director of Teaching and Learning are covered by academics on teaching focussed contracts specialised in language teaching.

Another challenge concerned the possibility to apply principles from the readings to current practices due to university policies constraints (e.g. the assessment pattern of a module must be the same for every single student). As much as a 'free thinking' space was needed and welcomed, there was also frustration among colleagues for the limitations that teaching within the university structures brings with itself.

The most practical and final issue was timing. Despite varying time slots, day and format of the meeting (online or hybrid), organising the meetings around the academic calendar to avoid days with multiple meeting or research events was extremely challenging. Perhaps in the future, the reading group meetings could be included in the academic calendar disseminated at the beginning of September.

BROADENING OUR SoTL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

As mentioned above, our experience of the reading group pointed at a clear over-representation of female participants, either in teaching and research contracts, in teaching-focussed ones or graduate teaching assistants. This coincides with the existing data on the role of gender in type of contracts, teaching activities, and SoTL participation (McKinney and Chick, 2010; Coderch, 2023). We therefore aimed at widening our SoTL community of practice by following Coderch's (2023) recommendation on the necessity of clarifying concepts, definitions and expectations of SoTL. In order to achieve this, 'the criteria for the evaluation of SoTL need, then, to be defined in line with what is expected from research: a valuable contribution to the advancement of knowledge. For this to happen, the acknowledgement of research activities needs to stop being reserved for the ranks of staff who are eligible to take part in the REF assessment' (Coderch, 2023, p.6). The next steps consisted in liaising with: (a) the Director of Research in our department to co-organise 'research and SoTL meetings'; and (b) academic developers with expertise in SoTL to offer a more tailored departmental support.

Our first research and SoTL meeting was designed as a first step towards restoring parity between discipline-specific research and SoTL and towards promoting a stronger understanding and appreciation of each other's role. During the session, colleagues were able to express their ideas, challenges, concerns, and expectations in a safe and supportive environment. As expected, many of these shared challenges, concerns, and expectations regarding SoTL coincide with what the literature on the topic has already identified across the sector (Bailey et al., 2022, p.269). A thematic analysis yielded the need of the following themes: more clarity on what is understood by SoTL; more support, visibility, recognition, dialogue, and collaboration across areas; a formal and recognised mentoring system, and more opportunities to share practice. These themes, in turn, helped us to draw our short term and long-term goals. The first one was soon addressed by organising a talk on 'What is SoTL', delivered by one academic developer specialising in the field. While a more balanced gender representation was not achieved, both events were well attended, sparking interesting discussions. Overall, we believe some progress has been achieved; this joint enterprise has given members a sense of community and ownership

LESSONS LEARNT AND WAYS FORWARD

A collaborative and integrated SoTL: collaboration is a crucial aspect of SoTL and communities of practice (Tierney et al., 2020). We clearly noted an emphasis on the ways that working, interacting, discussing, sharing, and collaborating with others supported us and our colleagues in our SoTL journey. But for this to be successful, it needs to be equally integrated in the department culture and activities. Our next event is a research away-day, co-organised with the Director of Research, consisting of a 'SoTL morning' with opportunities to share practice and explore how colleagues with complementary expertise can be brought together to set up a SoTL inquiry.

Specialised support: Tierney et al. (2020, p.44) have pointed how development opportunities are seen as a key factor in leading teaching staff from being a practitioner to a SoTL researcher. In our case, informal development events supported by an external specialist in SoTL has contributed to clarify the concept, the focus, the characteristics and the stages of SoTL. Our abovementioned 'SoTL morning' will also include a workshop focusing on the practicalities of undertaking and designing a SoTL inquiry, particularly looking at ethical criteria and considerations, delivered once again by an academic developer.

Visible support: this has led to more sharing and discussion of practice and the benefits of SoTL being seen and recognised on a wider scale. Thus, we envisage a dedicated SoTL space, either virtual or physical, where research and projects can be shared and disseminated, as an intrinsic part of SoTL.

Mentoring: SoTL has long depended on informal mentoring and support. While informal mentoring offers a lot of flexibility and benefits, it is often unrecognised in workloads. Therefore, we propose more formal mentoring as a way to increase practitioners' ability to undertake SoTL research.
Motivation and accountability: the pedagogy reading group showed that accountability and peer-support increase the motivation and 'positive' pressure to read scholarly articles during the more demanding and intensive academic year. The key is setting up some 'protective time' during the term. Writing groups using the pomodoro technique have been particularly successful in creating supportive, inclusive, and less hierarchical spaces and in forming enduring communities of practice (Kent et al., 2017).

Slow scholarship: it is worth mentioning that we have consciously avoided the language of performativity and productivity as this has never been one of our goals, given the staff wellbeing crisis caused by a more marketised higher education environment (Jayman, Glazzard and Rose, 2022). Instead, we have always sought to cultivate a supportive, sustainable, empathetic and flexible community of SoTL. It is important to bear in mind that academics are busier and working faster than ever (Berg and Seeber, 2016), while the focus is on what we do rather than on who we are (Ball, 2012). Colleagues might not be able to attend and engage with all SoTL events. However, this is not an indication of a lack of interest, just a lack of time. In our experience, we can affirm that practitioners value being part of a community of learning and practice. Slow scholarship (Mountz et al., 2015) should prioritize caring, allowing time to think, plan and work well as it has the transformative potential to make higher education institutions places where the whole learning community can collectively and collaboratively thrive.

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Teaching-informed scholarship: A conversation between two EAP practitioners and researchers of Asian descent

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how teaching contexts shape the scholarship journeys of two practitioners of EAP / ESL of East Asian descent. Adopting a critical co-constructed autoethnographic approach, our dialogue illustrates and reflects on our diverse experiences in various contexts of teaching, with the aim to engage fellow educators and scholars in similar conversations regarding teaching and scholarship. Specifically, we explore how various teaching contexts, including geographic locations, programme levels, and module types, have influenced our scholarship and research directions. We challenge the false dichotomy between research and teaching, emphasising that teaching can facilitate and enrich research with our own examples in corpus linguistics and sociolinguistics. Our own experiences have demonstrated the reciprocal feedback loop between teaching and scholarship. These diverse teaching experiences have allowed us to engage with students at various levels and draw inspiration from these interactions to benefit our scholarship journeys. In addition to the lessons learned, we also discuss challenges faced throughout our journeys, drawing on contexts of language teaching and raciolinguistic research. Our conversations call attention to the need to notice not just individual facets of identity but rather the dynamic intersections of migration history, race, gender, and age of practitioners of EAP / ESL and how they influence the ways in which they impact research and scholarship in the field. Doing so can assist and enrich the ways we understand the connections and natural feedback loop between teaching and learning in EAP, fostering a sense of humility and empathy among educators, positively influencing their pedagogical approaches.

KEYWORDS: academic writing, discipline-specific EAP, autoethnography

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we draw on raciolinguistic research and adopt critical co-constructed autoethnography (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012, 2020; Warren-Gordon & Jackson-Brown, 2022) as a methodology to delve into some key moments in our academic lives that forefront the ways they have impacted our pedagogies. In this piece, we recount experiences where our teaching contexts have influenced our scholarship. While we both enter academia with clear paths of scholarship and research in mind, our teaching engagements turn out to have greatly influenced our scholarship. We hope the discussion of our experiences that are diverse in different ways will be productive for fellow practitioners and instructors. In this piece, we address how our teaching contexts have shaped or guided our scholarship. Here we define "teaching context" broadly to include geographical locations, programme levels, and the nature of the modules. We also want to highlight the false dichotomy between scholarship and teaching. There already exists a vast body of literature on research-informed teaching or teaching-informed research (Sharkey, 2018; Rose, 2019), which is not in any way a contested notion to our knowledge. On the other hand, though, there is a persistent notion that great researchers should not spend too much of their time on teaching -- which likely comes from the "publish-or-perish" culture. We would like to use our own examples to showcase that teaching can in fact be facilitative to scholarship and research; in the case of scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), hands-on teaching is even more crucial. Meanwhile, researcher-teachers constantly get inspiration from teaching and supervision. We consider it natural to have a feedback loop between teaching and scholarship.

Both of us have taught in a wide variety of contexts, as well as skills and content courses. We perceive teaching contexts broadly in terms of geographical location, level of students, size of the institution, and any other factors that affect our teaching practice. Collectively, we have taught in the United Kingdom, United States, Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan. In terms of teaching, each of us has worked on a very wide range of modules. Charles was trained in formal and experimental linguistics, but took up teaching and supervision duties in applied linguistics and EAP modules that have shaped his scholarship towards corpus and English linguistics. Genevieve was trained in educational linguistics, specifically in language and cultural maintenance in Chinese American communities. She has spent most of her academic career teaching academic speaking and writing classes in EAP programs in universities in the U.S. The variety of teaching allows us to interact with students at different levels and be inspired by such interactions. We also discuss the challenges and lessons learned through our journeys.

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical/Methodological foregrounding

In many academic spaces where it is more “valuable” to produce single-authored publications, it is not common or considered “advantageous” for scholars to collaborate, let alone reflect together on shared pedagogies and classroom experiences. Despite this, work on critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical co-constructed autoethnography has noted how providing researchers with the collaborative space to reflect on the tempo, uncertainty, complexity of research relationship and how friendships might facilitate this process is an important and needed part of the teaching and collaboration process (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012; 2020). Following Cann and Demeulenaere’s methodology, the two authors of this paper used this technique to engage each other in a collaborative interview and writing process to discuss our stories and experiences, focusing on our racialized and multilingual selves across different points of time and space. This was particularly helpful because as academics and teachers, we have never been based in the same parts of the world, though there have been definite overlaps in our student populations; we model this collaborative autoethnography after others that draw on friendship as a method of inquiry with the potential to transform space and time via counter storytelling to challenge dominant power structures (c.f., Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Tillmann-Healy, 2003; Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013). We started the dialogues on Zoom and continued on a shared Google document. Analysing the chapter template and prompt together, we responded in the form of a Q-A narrative, with the goal of supporting each other. We feel the latter is particularly important to address because as Warren-Gordon and Jackson-Brown, two Black female faculty members working in a predominately White institution, illustrate in their 2022 work, the value of using co-constructed autoethnography lies in articulating voices of those who have traditionally been underrepresented in academia. In choosing to collaborate in this way, we, like other scholars before us, seek allyship in each other through this process.

The autoethnographic approach

Generally, an ethnography refers to "the recording and analysis of a culture or society, usually based on participant-observation and resulting in a written account of a people, place or institution" (Simpson and Coleman, 2017). In the present autoethnographic account, we are the participants as well as the observers, providing the advantage of thorough understanding of our own experience and motivations as practitioner-scholar in language and linguistics, allowing us to reflect on our practice and journey of teaching and scholarship.

Specific to EAP, the recent contribution by Collins and Holliday (2023: 177-179) points out how the "expansion of ethnographic possibilities" reveals knowledge that was previously unrecognised. By stressing the use of ethnography beyond a data collection method, Collins and Holliday also show how the ethnography can provide a different perspective to offer new insights in the meaning-making, following Blommaert (2018). To differentiate the autoethnographic approach from traditional quantitative and qualitative methods, Canagarajah (2012: 114-115) lists several features of autoethnography, such as "self as the basis for knowledge", "role of narrative in constructing knowledge", "learning from emotions'', "the validity of constructivism" and "the objective of social change", which also serve as the foundation of the present study. Of particular interest is a recent study by Schmor et al. (2023) that discusses three plurilingual EAP instructors through trioethnographic interviews. They explore how their lived experiences shaped plurilingual teaching practices, revealing a progression from linguistic and cultural microaggressions (e.g., accent-based microaggressions) to "microaffirmations" (e.g. reframing monolingual ideologies to acknowledge plurilingualism). Moreover, as Tejada-Sánchez (2020) notes, an autoethnographic approach answers questions such as, "What were the key milestones in my professional development? How did I become a critically reflexive teacher, and what have been my guiding notions in the construction of a professional self?" (p. 104). These previous studies, taken together, highlight the significance and relevance of the ethnographic approach to understand practice in EAP. However, most of these studies focus on student education and have not discussed scholarly work or identity of EAP practitioners. This study therefore attempts to complement the previous studies by advancing the discussion beyond practice in teaching and learning.

Critical co-constructed autoethnographic exploration

Below is a process of us asking each other questions that we have had on our minds but were not able to fully process in an academic manner until now. The anecdotes we have chosen to share have been intentionally selected to illustrate the systematic and institutional issues related to our field at every stage of the academic pipeline. We hope that by sharing our lived experiences and reflections, we show how forms of systematic constraints within higher education and language teaching affect not only our - but our students' - abilities to navigate academia.

HOW OUR SCHOLARSHIP HAS BEEN INFORMED BY TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Charles: Thanks for agreeing to have this conversation! Do you remember how we met each other?

Genevieve: I think we first met at an academic conference on Cantonese linguistics at the Ohio State University in 2016! We didn't really talk too much during the actual conference, but I believe a bunch of us went out for ice cream with the conference organizers after the conference was over, and I remember you being very friendly. I also remember that you were very nice to my graduate student, and that stood out to me because ordinarily faculty don't pay attention to graduate students because they're the lowest on the totem pole. The fact that you even paid attention to my student was really something that was meaningful to me. I thought, "Wow, this guy seems like a cool dude." Over the years we've kept in touch, co-presented together at conferences, co-authored various publications, and been good academic friends and allies. You even hosted me and my student once when we were presenting at a conference in Hong Kong, which was extremely generous. I also have to say, as a Chinese American scholar doing work on Cantonese, you have always been supportive and understanding - you have never imposed a perspective that I had to be like or sound like a "Hong Konger," which I have always appreciated. When my maternal grandmother passed away in 2016 and I had to give the eulogy in Cantonese, you offered your help in proofreading and wordsmithing my bilingual Cantonese-English script, which was invaluable because I could not ask my own family members for help because they were all grieving from my grandmother's unexpected passing. I am not sure if you knew how much this help and validation meant to me as both a researcher and fellow Cantonese speaker from the diaspora. In my academic lifetime it has been rare to be accepted unconditionally by researchers from Hong Kong.

C: That's very nice to hear, thanks! I was fascinated by the works of your student and you from the perspective of Asian Americans. I was then a newly appointed assistant professor in an English department, definitely navigating my way as a faculty member. Being in a Cantonese-focused linguistics workshop actually attracted some questions within my department. I think it's revealing about the many presumed and oversimplified dichotomies in language studies: target languages of research, quantitative vs. qualitative methodology (I happen to appreciate both approaches, not to mention mixed-method research), theoretical vs. empirical (I personally do not see how you can do one without understanding the other). My training was in formal linguistics under the Chomskyan generative tradition, which is by nature non-colonial because of its position that different languages are equal manifestations of the human language faculty. I have always felt like a black sheep that my interests involve both English and Cantonese -- wherever I go, there's another part that does not seem to belong. However, it actually worked out well, because I also got to teach a linguistics module on comparative grammar. While this is well-aligned with my own research at the time, I did struggle a bit with the preconception that English is somehow a better language (mostly from students) --- which my training in the United States did not fully prepare me for.

Your teaching and research also involve different languages, how's your experience? I think part of the reason we became academic friends was how we both embrace multilingualism in our teaching and research. It is not often to find colleagues who can share similar experiences.

G: True - I think you and I became fast friends because we both knew what it was like to be at the sort of "periphery," in multiple senses of the word. Though I was hired to teach in an English as a Second Language (ESL) department in 2012, which was later renamed Academic English for Multilingual Students in 2014, I've always felt like my "real" research wasn't ever squarely about this population of students and that much of my time was spent pretending that I belonged in this department. Like the case of many universities, there was a time when we were recruiting a very large population of international students, mostly from mainland China, who were willing to pay full private school tuition (which is now upwards of $80,000 USD), without fully thinking through how to best support these students academically. Even at my job interview, when the committee stated they had a high influx of Chinese international students and that many students spoke Mandarin, I specifically told the interview committee that my research looked at Cantonese-speaking Chinese Americans. Either they did not have the knowledge that this was a different population, or they just assumed one "Asian" faculty member was fine to address all "Asian" students' needs. As a Chinese American child of immigrants from Hong Kong and Southern China, part of me wanted to scream, "I'm not like my students!!! I'm an American!" but at the same time I feel a sense of responsibility to make sure these students are not being exploited like other immigrants have been before them in so many other U.S. contexts.

And when I see some of the shortcomings in addressing these needs, it really becomes an issue of equity. How can we draw on our international students' assets if we only see them as cash cows? How can we help our international students graduate in four years as promised if we cannot ensure there are classes and linguistic and academic supports for them to succeed? Can we more equitably ensure that our international students have a more positive experience at our university? I definitely think we can do a stronger job at supporting these students.

C: I like what you just said about the sense of responsibility for these students. In a way I'm more like them in terms of the learning experience. I grew up in Asia and studied in Europe and the U.S. I feel that my personal experience is relevant for my students (especially those in postgraduate programmes), even for international students who are not from East Asian backgrounds, I still find it useful and encouraging to see an instructor that shares their own experiences.

Definitely we can do a better job in supporting students. In my context of teaching, I think what students often need is far beyond the basic level of grammar or writing correct English. Rather, they need to see how they can express themselves in the academic world. I have once heard a colleague suggesting that their students' English was not good enough to hold daily conversations, insinuating that they should not be in postgraduate programmes. That made me think: "Hmm, the daily conversation or the small talks are often the hardest part for me, especially with a native speaker from the host country." I had often assumed that this is common knowledge, though it probably is not the case. I think it goes back to some basic understanding of second language learners and this myth that students can only move to the next level until they have mastered everything at what is considered the lower level. It certainly surfaces as an education and social justice issue, but my training in formal linguistics keeps reminding me that better understanding of the science of language might also be relevant.

G: It always kind of shocks me when I hear fellow linguists - folks who are (supposedly?) trained in the nuances between descriptivism and prescriptivism - take such an uncritical and deficit view towards students whose first language isn't English. Actually, my first language is not English, either - I spent the first five years of my life speaking primarily Cantonese, though my parents were advanced degree holders and could speak English perfectly fine - they just thought it was important for me and my younger brother to foster our Cantonese first. When it was time to go to public schools, we were put in ESL classes and it was immediately apparent to me that English was the language of access and privilege in school. I turned off my Cantonese pretty much immediately in public. I think that is what makes our positionalities so important - yours coming from someone born and raised in Asia and mine as the child of immigrants from Asia - for both our colleagues and for our students.

C: You would hope that the power imbalance between English and other languages is better understood where English is not the dominant language (at least outside of the university setting), but I cannot say that's true in my experience. I've started teaching EAP since 2015, initially within the English department for undergraduate linguistics writing, but it gradually expanded to teaching more generic EAP modules for first years. In Hong Kong, students are typically very experienced learners in English. Most subjects in the secondary schools are taught in English, both at secondary and tertiary education settings. Teaching academic writing had definitely got me thinking more deeply about language teaching beyond the grammar or sentential level, especially when the materials I received were quite prescriptive. There was a pervasive notion that students need to build a good foundation (read: to write perfectly grammatical sentences) before they can handle more complex areas of writing (read: to learn about paragraphs and discourse). I ended up incorporating a lot of materials that I considered scientifically sound and grounded in linguistics. I actually had a good experience teaching writing, drawing on my own experiences and challenges as an academic writer.

G: That's great you found these connections. I think I really resisted calling myself an "EAP" practitioner for a long time because although I have done this type of teaching for pay, this was not really what I was trained to do as a sociolinguist and researcher of language maintenance. Maybe it's a disciplinary thing, but when you are in a service department like mine, you oftentimes are only seen as "just" teaching first-year or remedial writing. I spent a lot of time trying to carve out a space that showed others I don't "just" teach international students remedial English, that I actually teach domestic students, too, and content, at that. But honestly as I began teaching across different populations, especially mixed classes where domestic, international, and 1.5 generation students were in class together, I realised quickly these "boundaries" were really quite blurry. It took a while but finally I realised I could craft different writing assignments where my students can still write about topics they/I both care about. In my food writing class, we do interviews with family members and write about treasured family recipes. We also do an "origin story" assignment where we do a research paper on the history of a specific food item. Almost always, students, regardless of where they were born or what their residence status is, draw on their multilingual, rich immigration histories and family stories to craft their assignments. When I think about my work through this lens, it makes contextualising my work much easier.

C: Food writing class?! That is really cool! Was your article on linguistic landscape and food a product of the class? Or did the class draw on the article? Either way, it is just fantastic to connect your teaching and research.

G: This is a good question and the connection is actually something I never really thought about before until now. The project on the linguistic landscape of Philadelphia Chinatown and the one on intergenerational soup making talk came way before the food writing class was developed. I think it's because I used to think that writing classes had to be based on canonical texts or "serious" writing and teach from an assigned textbook. I guess this was just how I experienced writing classes as an undergrad. (And come to think of it, I really hated those writing classes - the class I took to fulfil the writing requirement was a course on some sort of obscure poetry, and I never understood the content or the writing assignments at all.) It wasn't until I started doing more content/theme-based classes like Language and Power that I realised I could play around with my readings more, including a mix of academic and personal writing, and that my students actually enjoyed this way of doing class much more. The theme of food was just to get students excited about the class (who doesn't like food, right?) but maybe deep inside, that class was just waiting to be crafted all along because it was based on research I was already doing. I'm actually doing a summer immersion class taking students to Taiwan this summer to look at food and cultural ecosystems! How fun is that? It took me a while to connect all the dots, but I'm glad things finally all aligned. It has been a nice way to integrate teaching and research. And how about you? It seems your research on corpus is also directly related to some of the content you've taught before?

C: Yes, the link is actually rather direct. I was first hired to teach comparative grammar and corpus linguistics in an English department. With corpus specifically, I think a lot has been said about research-informed teaching, given that attested data can directly facilitate writing instructions, for example, teaching students what the frequent words and common phrases are for specific genres and disciplines. However, the teaching-informed research seems to receive less attention. I had, for example, written about how the English language curriculum in the "World Englishes" context should be adjusted to suit the needs for learners of academic writing. It was interesting to reflect on the practice of teaching students of language studies that are more familiar with humanistic argumentation but less confident in digital skills. This project was directly inspired by my English-major students who had interests in literature. Since then, I have been an advocate for using literary texts to pique students' interests in corpus and quantitative studies - which I consider an essential skill for all career paths.

EVERYDAY POLITICS WITH GENDER AND RACE

C: In addition to the subject matter as the teaching context, I think another important factor affecting our scholarly activities has to do with the power dynamics with other colleagues. I feel I'm often seen as a young scholar, both within my institution and mingling with the research community, but being a man seems to be to my advantage. How has your experience been?

G: I'm glad you bring this up. Even though I have been teaching English for 20 years now, I still get "mistaken" for a student by my colleagues despite the fact I am clearly wearing "teacher" work clothes and an ID badge that only faculty wear. When I correct my colleagues, they almost always respond that it's because I "look so young" and try to spin it as a compliment. I've had a colleague tell me I remind her of her daughter and then proceed to give me unsolicited feedback about my apparel and how to interact with students. I regularly get these types of comments about my clothes - to the point where I feel like I need to say I always make sure my work clothes are not overtly marked as "juvenile"! My go-to outfits are always slacks or a knee-length skirt, a button-down shirt, and a sweater. I've also had a colleague comment that my office looks "so Asian" (to this day I have no idea how an office "looks Asian" - the only Asian thing in my office was me!) I've had students ask whether they should call me "Mrs." or "Ms." without even considering "Professor" was also an option. I wonder if you have received similar comments, but I suspect many of the comments I have received expose ideologies situated at the intersections of age, gender, and race. I would be surprised if you got comments about clothes at the same frequency I did.

For my students, I understand that my correcting them might be a good learning moment for them in their socialization and professionalization into academia. For my colleagues, I think this also stems from larger structural inequalities that include very limited representation of Asian/Asian American female faculty in the field. Did you know that according to 2022 U.S. statistics, of all associate professors in the U.S., only 5.7% identify as Asian female? For full professors, it's even lower: 4%! Not that it absolves the comments I get, but if our institutions do not see people like me represented in the faculty, we will always be dismissed as not-faculty.

C: The gender imbalance is particularly evident when you look at graduate students in both master and doctoral programmes. There are definitely more female students, and I do not think it is a recent development, but the faculty does not seem to reflect the similar proportion -- at least in some of the places I'd worked at. In my experience in East Asia, white male colleagues are unfortunately still seen as more legitimate in some implied hierarchy, regardless of the topic in question. I've had multiple incidents where I was explaining something about the local culture to a new colleague who was white. The attention of this new colleague completely shifted to another colleague who interrupted in an attempt to give additional information. You guessed it, this other helpful colleague was, too, a white person. The colleague who accidentally cut me off from the conversation was actually a good friend and ally. We discussed it afterwards and he felt bad. I was almost amused by how systematic and predictable this behaviour is -- by the new colleague.

My experience in the UK has been more positive. One institution I worked at is rather small and caters to a very local population. Understandably, students are mostly white and there are not many East Asians on campus. One might expect that it would be a difficult experience for me as the absolute minority as a faculty member, but I never had any issue with my colleagues or students. The difference really got me thinking how much this sort of twisted hierarchy was learned / acquired / perpetuated. It seems as though, in a setting where I look too foreign, I am judged more as an individual without being associated with any particular prejudice -- well, other than being mistaken for a student on campus once. Of course, I should also point out that the colleagues in my department have significantly more international experience and are all in linguistics, which tends to be a more liberal discipline.

That said, I should point out that being a man has its privilege in various settings in higher education. For example, I did not feel I was expected by students to provide as much emotional support as some of my colleagues who identify as women did, which saved me from the constant oversharing that these colleagues experienced. I think the contrast is particularly stark when project supervision is involved, or in smaller departments or institutions, where faculty members are assigned to be mentors for the entire four or three years of study.

G: That's interesting that you've experienced privilege and marginalisation in these different settings. I don't think enough has been talked about in terms of teacher identity along these interrelated lines. And the emotional labour you describe is totally real. Even before the pandemic, students were regularly coming into my office seeking someone with a sympathetic ear. There would be students of colour coming into my office crying at least once a week, sometimes about finances, not fitting in as first-generation students, course content struggles, relationship troubles, thoughts of self-harm. Much of their conversations with me had nothing to do with writing, language, or advising - and many of their concerns I was not trained to address and I could only refer them to our campus psychological services office. Now, especially coming out of the pandemic, I'm finding that students are experiencing mental health crises much more often. It not just affects their ability to do well in the course but also succeed in the university. I'm not sure if my male colleagues experience the same degree of having to do this kind of emotional work, but it's draining. I sometimes find myself having to take a break from "work" in order to process and decompress from conversations with students.

When this first started happening I was really resisting - I kept thinking, "When I was a student I would not have the gall to talk to my professors about these kinds of concerns. What's wrong with students these days?" After a bit of reflecting, I also realised throughout my many years of tertiary schooling, I never had any advisors, let alone professors, who looked like me or even had experiences remotely similar to mine as a student of colour. So perhaps this level of empathy - coupled with my students' bravery to reach out to a faculty member of colour - can also fall in line with transformative teaching. If we truly aim to change the institution, we need to first meet our students where they are and understand what their basic needs and concerns are. I just wish the distribution of labour in doing this were divided more evenly.

C: Speaking of transformation, I do feel that the culture in higher education is gradually changing. Like what you just said, faculty members need to acknowledge that we should meet our students where they are. It seems that institutions are at least taking "student experience" more seriously and willing to see how it might work out when students are getting more support. Did you get to turn some of these challenges, or shall we say learning experience, into scholarship and useful lessons for fellow scholars?

G: Most certainly - I think it helped me find community in scholars who first and foremost understand what it's like to be "me," and by that I mean understanding the many intersecting identities that comprise "me". It doesn't mean they have to have my exact lived experiences, but it helps that they approach work with some of the same lenses I do. It also helps when we feel fired up about the same things, including when we find ourselves feeling similarly indignant about various issues related to teaching and/or research. This has helped me co-author various pieces related to critical applied linguistics and autoethnographic experiences around raciolinguistics, which has in turn helped me ground my own teaching practices.

C: For me, I think my teaching contexts have inspired some of my scholarship projects quite directly. In the process of introducing the linguistic diversity to students in a comparative grammar class, I got to revisit some old research interests, and include how different forms were used to express the same (e.g., different strategies of showing plural), or how the same form across languages can bear different meanings (think reduplication in English "He ordered a *salad-salad*", cf. Ghomeshi et al [2004]). I feel that students often appreciate instructors finding relevant examples in addition to what appears on textbooks or prepared materials.

The other interesting project I have worked on was a collaboration with a colleague in literature who also has interests in digital humanities and data-driven studies in both teaching and research. The collaboration was largely borne out of our constant complaints about students' averse attitude towards using digital tools. As a response, we ended up with an article discussing how we address the technophobia with a few successful examples. My department at the time was quite "theory-driven", so I would be careful not to oversell the impact. I remember distinctly that a colleague asked me if I agreed that the quantitative lens to language would "ruin the beauty of language". I think the question itself is a manifestation of what I meant earlier by false dichotomies about scholarship.

WHAT'S THE TAKE-AWAY?

C: One take-away I can think of is that, like it or not, our actual teaching practice and also research activities are always going to be impacted by various factors. Factors like location, taught discipline, level of the curriculum, student population – among many others – often shape how we teach. If I already spend time understanding students' needs through my teaching, it would only be reasonable to leverage the same knowledge to inform my scholarly activities, wouldn't it? Therefore, I often see teaching-informed scholarship to be necessary, especially when time is a consideration. As we continue to conduct research, these factors prompt us to consider certain things more important than some others. In ESL or EAP, that might mean that we are prioritising certain areas of writing or language, or focussing more on students' language needs.

G: Maybe this is too "bold" a claim here, but I think whenever I hear a faculty member say they "only" care about research, I oftentimes wonder how they can not also care about students. Similarly, for those who say they "only" care about teaching and don't have enough bandwidth for research, I also wonder why those two categories cannot be both part and parcel. I think as we have both experienced, our own experiences teaching "international" students (or perhaps more specifically, students who share some heritage of migration and dislocation to us or our ancestors) actually grounds our research and teaching practices. For us, these two can't be divorced from each other. In fact, as we've discussed in this piece together, they truly do inform each other and provide us with a sense of humility, perspective, and empathy that drives our pedagogy, and that can only be a positive thing, right?

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Creating research opportunities for pre-sessional EAP practitioners

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I discuss the benefits of creating research opportunities for fixed-term teaching staff on pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. Now more than ever, active engagement with scholarship is becoming increasingly important for both individual EAP practitioners as well as for the field of EAP as a whole: Universities recruiting pre-sessional teaching staff require applicants to demonstrate initial engagement with research on their resumes, whilst EAP departments rely on the output of innovative and impactful research to dispel the false image of EAP being a service provider rather than an academic field in its own right. To map out some of the opportunities and challenges for pre-sessional instructor-researchers, I first highlight logistical obstacles and ethical dilemmas before discussing the advantages of collaborative research projects to circumvent some of these challenges. Acknowledging the value and merit of reflective and semi-formal scholarship writing in EAP, I then also draw attention to the importance of original, primary research.

KEYWORDS: ethical research in EAP, pre-sessional research in EAP, collaborative scholarship in EAP, barriers to research, ethics literacy

INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

Every summer, universities welcome external colleagues to teach and tutor on their pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. Whilst the top priorities of pre-sessional staff of course comprise the student-centred teaching and learning-oriented assessment across numerous cohorts, continuous professional development (CPD) too plays a key role for everyone involved in the design and delivery of a summer pre-sessional. As engagement with CPD and research is increasingly seen as a crucial attribute for EAP practitioners on teaching contracts, I want to, in this article, advocate for why pre-sessional teaching should be more effectively included in scholarship and research activities during and beyond their fixed-term employment.

Although I personally view teaching and research as inherently intertwined, I appreciate that colleagues with particularly intensive teaching contracts (during as well as beyond the summer months) simply do not have the capacity to engage in scholarship to the same degree as a fully funded postdoctoral researcher for instance might. That being said, I believe that teaching professionals inadvertently collect valuable data each time they enter the EAP classroom. Educators who, on average, spend between ten and fifteen weekly contact hours with the same cohort will arguably become more aware of patterns in learning behaviour, current issues with popular digital tools, or recurring themes in student concerns than, for instance, colleagues with a less teaching-intensive schedule. An intensive summer pre-sessional thus ideally lends itself to the pursuit of impactful research projects focused on areas including but not limited to student motivation, formative feedback loops, or multimodal learning technologies.

Empowering pre-sessional teaching staff to participate in research serves a dual purpose. Whilst increased engagement in scholarship supports the growth of EAP as an academic field, the opportunity to pursue research can allow practitioners to further develop their academic identities by becoming more evidence-based in their practice. As aptly pointed out by Ding (2019), it is crucial to 'invest in practitioners so that they can achieve an identity, through development and scholarship, that affords them the recognition and agency needed to fully participate in and influence the university' (p.68). Fixed-term pre-sessional teaching staff tend to, due to their temporary contracts and teaching-focused roles, have fewer opportunities to contribute to the wider scholarship in EAP, which can, in turn, cause ruptures and disconnects amongst EAP practitioners. Rather than widening the gap between teaching and research, I argue that integrating the two can lead to practitioners being more confident in their craft, secure in their teaching philosophy, and intentional in their approach to course and assessment design. Drawing on Archer (2003, p.120), Ding (2019) moreover states that 'professional identity is reflexively indexed to ethics and action' (p.64). With this article, I wish to explore this connectedness of ethics, identity, and agency. By referring to relevant scholarship and autoethnographically reflecting on my own experiences as a former fixed-term EAP practitioner with a vested interest in research, I will outline some of the challenges pre-sessional instructor-researchers may face and propose strategies for how these might be overcome.

PROMOTING ETHICAL RESEARCH IN EAP

The pursuit of ethically sound research, especially in education, calls for both practical experience in the field as well as procedural knowledge of relevant research practices. Whilst tangible experience allows the researcher to identify and conceptualize innovative research questions, knowledge of research practices is crucial for the ethical design and execution of a study or critical enquiry. An EAP practitioner who can demonstrate both will be better able to wield agency as a contributor to the wider scholarship. Academia, however, is far from self-explanatory. To fixed-term staff in particular, the internal processes and protocols of a temporary employer university may not always appear as straight-forward or transparent. For instance, the criteria for studies which must undergo ethical pre-approval will differ from one university to the next, and the time it takes for a study to be pre-approved may range from weeks to months, depending on the institution. By proactively informing both fixed-term and longer-term staff about the winding paths to research, EAP departments can promote the autonomous production of research output on a greater level.

Encouraging instructors of EAP to engage in ethical research represents a positive step for any institution that aims to promote evidence-based approaches to planning, teaching, and assessment whilst also keeping research close to practice. Impactful scholarship is moreover, as previously mentioned, important for EAP to attain recognition as an academic field in its own right (Webster, 2022, p.2; see also Ding and Bruce, 2017). Additionally, more and more universities are listing engagement with scholarship and CPD amongst their desirable and sometimes even essential criteria for the successful recruitment on their pre-sessional EAP courses. Research by Webster (2022) suggests this growing demand for scholarship to be one of the main motivators for why EAP practitioners are engaging with research more closely as of late (p.7). Indeed, many teaching and learning departments have long been promoting the professional development of staff by offering accreditation schemes, coordinating CPD sessions, and organizing university-internal conferences. I personally can attest to UK universities – and specifically their EAP departments and language centres – being exceptionally supportive in this regard.

The readiness of departments to enable and the willingness of practitioners to commit to life-long learning is, as established, seldom the issue when it comes to increasing research activity in EAP. Rather, it is logistical obstacles and constraints that appear to be a major factor as to why certain research projects do not materialize and why others end up being published without prior consultation of an ethics committee (see Stockley and Balkwill, 2013, p.0). Although the adherence to ethical guidelines is particularly important for studies which involve participants, the red tape around ethical pre-approval processes often deters researchers from pursuing such projects (Petrova and Barclay, 2019, pp.1-2).

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ETHICAL PRE-SESSIONAL RESEARCH

Because university ethics committees receive such high volumes of proposals and applications each year, it comes as no surprise that a decision on a given study will often take several weeks, if not months. Purely logistically, this will already make it difficult for a fixed-term pre-sessional EAP practitioner to attain pre-approval for a study they wish to conduct over the course of a 6-week contract, for instance. Furthermore, seeking pre-approval in advance, before the practitioner's fixed-term employment officially commences, will likely not even be possible, as a formal affiliation with the university is often a non-negotiable pre-requisite for a researcher to have their proposal evaluated by the respective ethics committee. Of course, if the EAP practitioner is employed with another university prior to their fixed-term employment elsewhere, they may opt to seek pre-approval with said university's ethics committee. Though this would at least solve the issue of gaining ethical pre-approval, it creates entirely new issues surrounding the question of affiliation: If University A formally approves a study, this implies affiliation between the research conducted and University A. If the data, however, is collected on a pre-sessional course at University B but University B is in no way informed of this or involved in the pre-approval, this in and of itself becomes unethical (especially if the EAP practitioner in question is employed to teach and not to conduct unaffiliated research during work hours with University B).

When a participant-centred research project does attain pre-approval, ethical issues can still arise further along in the researching process. Any study which examines participants over a longer period of time is prone to being affected by unexpected discoveries or unanticipated changes in the research environment. It is therefore essential for instructor-researchers to be made aware of the precautions they might need to take under such circumstances. For instance, participants may experience changes in their personal lives, which might affect the study's ethical robustness, or relevant data might emerge from unexpected and unaccounted for sources (Miller, 2013, pp.142, 147). To prevent such ethical dilemmas, pre-sessional researchers may be well advised to include an 'incidental/ unexpected findings policy' (Griffin and Leibetseder, 2019) in their research proposals.

However, it cannot be expected of an EAP practitioner who is entirely new to research to be aware of every such intricacy, requirement, or caveat. Whilst every researcher certainly holds responsibility to do their due diligence before commencing a research project, departmental support and guidance in terms of the more formal and logistical matters can easily be offered by experts and/ or colleagues who have more extensive experience with more complex-leaning research projects. What is more, ethical standards and guidelines change over time. It was not long ago that universities across the globe updated their ethics policies to explicitly require researchers to obtain *informed* consent from their participants (see Tulyakul and Meepring, 2020, p.86). As the ethical landscape of academia continues to rapidly evolve, the continuous development and adaptive flexibility of aspiring and established researchers alike will remain necessary. Whether this will mean for introductory ethics trainings to be incorporated into pre-sessional inductions or whether resources like researcher handbooks or ethics quick-guides provided asynchronously, I believe that even the most subtle encouragement can inspire teaching staff to become more actively involved in research during their fixed-term contracts.

Aside from offering introductory trainings and resources at the start of a pre-sessional, another solution to problems pertaining to logistics and time constraints may be the proactive collaboration between fixed-term and permanent (or longer-term) staff. A more permanent member of staff could, for instance, apply for pre-approval for a joint project long before the fixed-term colleague's work at the university commences. Such arrangements can be convenient for internal researchers who require the facilitative collaboration of full-time teaching practitioners to collect primary data, for instance. Sharing responsibility and workload on a co-authored paper in this way not only solves logistical complications, but it also enables colleagues to benefit from one another's unique perspectives. What often makes pre-sessional teaching teams so effective in spite of the fast-paced teaching and learning environment is the fact that different individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences come together to work toward a shared goal. Moreover, intentionally collaborating on and sharing the credit for a joint research project can also prevent fixed-term staff from feeling exploited by internal researchers using the data arisen from the fixed-term practitioner's pre-sessional classroom activities, assessment, and feedback. Of course, although collaboration and community-building certainly should be encouraged, opportunities for valuable research should not solely depend on an EAP practitioner's ability to find a willing collaborator or co-author.

Aside from helping lift research projects off the ground, targeted collaboration can also be regarded as a promising avenue for future ethics procedures to become more thorough, efficient, and reliable. In their discussion of research ethics, Griffin and Leibetseder (2019), for instance, cite McCormack et al. (2012), who propose a more 'participative approach to ethics reviews, with relevant researchers being more involved in the related discussions' (Griffin and Leibetseder, 2019). Similarly, 'subject-specific templates' (Petrova and Barclay, 2019, p.9) and ethics reviews 'by committees within [their] respective academic departments' (p.9) could be a step in the right direction for researchers of EAP as well. Petrova and Barclay (2019) moreover speculate that '[p]erhaps, in the not too distant future, existing Research Ethics Committees will turn into local training and advice centres, while much larger ethics review teams do most of the work online' (p.11). For studies in EAP which do not entail the collection or analysis of exceptionally sensitive data, field-specific templates and proactive trainings might indeed be a viable option for research proposals to be processed more expeditiously. It appears that at some – though certainly not all – universities, designated ethics committees have already formed to oversee the research conducted at specific schools or colleges within the respective universities. Moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach to ethics appears to not only be more time-efficient but also more thorough than pervasive 'ideas of 'ethical universalism' across (and within) disciplines' (Miller, 2023, p.148; see also Reissman, 2005, p.487).

THE MERIT OF REFLECTION AND IMPORTANCE OF ORIGINALITY

Although this article advocates for the inclusion of pre-sessional teaching staff in research activities, it does not imply that a large percentage of EAP practitioners do not already conduct and disseminate valuable research at present. In fact, the abundance of EAP and teaching and learning conferences, BALEAP events, and language and literacy webinars clearly indicates that practitioners consistently contribute to the state of the field. As an EAP practitioner who greatly values open and accessible scholarship, I have also found it exciting to observe the rise of semi-formal outlets wherein EAP practitioners are now able to share academic think pieces or reflective accounts in written formats. However, as much as texts of more reflective-academic genres, such as this very article, constitute an important element of peer exchange in the EAP community, primary research must not be neglected as an important and scientific part of the scholarship in our field.

Returning to the aspect of research ethics for studies involving participant data, I want to draw attention to the need for greater ethics literacy in the realm of teaching and learning. Stockley and Balkwill (2013) found that researchers from the field had not seldomly

> conducted research that should have undergone research ethics board (REB) review, but did not; that should have included a consent process for the use of student data or previous work, but did not; or that started out as program evaluation and became research without meeting the criteria of ethically acceptable research conduct (p.0).

It is not always clear whether a researcher's failure to seek ethical approval stems from a lack of awareness, a disdain for the red tape, or other reasons. Neither is it always clear what the consequences are for research projects which have been conducted and published without the necessary pre-approval. Whilst some researchers will view this lack of transparency around possible consequences as an invitation to confuse ethical requirements for recommendations, others may outright avoid conducting any research at all that could potentially cause problems or raise concerns.

As a perhaps less daunting and gentler introduction to scholarship writing, EAP practitioners may therefore opt to, as previously mentioned, write reflective pieces or academic blog posts for publication in their home university's journals or magazines (Webster, 2022, p.10). Reflective and semi-formal texts will typically contain more anecdotal information rather than concrete data and therefore, generally, not require pre-approval by an ethics committee. Furthermore, less formal formats are often more accessible in terms of style, format, and medium. If a pre-sessional practitioner has delivered a CPD session, for instance, they can choose to further elaborate on their topic in writing and make it instantly accessible to an even wider audience as an academic blogpost instead of having it be forthcoming for several months only to then be hidden behind a paywall.

Although academic reflections and think pieces certainly have merit and constitute an invaluable and more accessible means of sharing new thoughts and ideas with colleagues, it is important to remember the necessity for original, primary research in EAP. If dauntingly complicated approval processes become a growing reason for the stagnation of original research, then this can have detrimental consequences for the state of the field. Researchers who resort to sharing their insights on a purely anecdotal level or by relying on existing, published studies to support their own observations run the risk of confirmation bias: If I make a seemingly significant observation in my own classroom but do not have the time, capacity, or resources to conduct primary research to confirm my tentative and informal findings, my only other apparent option might be to find research which affirms my intuitive conclusions. However, I cannot be sure that a new study of my own would have not, in fact, disproven my hypothesis and thus represented a valuable counterargument to the existing research on the same topic. Even for claims and conclusions which may appear plausible enough not to necessarily demand quantitative evidence, the provision of concrete data to support said claims adds a layer of credibility to the research which, in turn, adds credibility to the academic field of EAP overall.

CONCLUSION

Until ethical pre-approval processes become more efficient and researcher-friendly, EAP departments can take meaningful steps toward the empowerment of instructor-researchers. As discussed, brief segues into research opportunities during pre-sessional induction weeks or short handbooks on research ethics can be a deciding first step in the promotion of pre-sessional scholarship. Collaborations between permanent and fixed-term staff can potentially not only result in fresh perspectives, emerging theories, and ground-breaking insights for the field of EAP, but they can also help solve logistical issues pertaining to affiliation and time constraints. Encouraging instructor-researchers to collect and analyse primary data additionally may help combat the repeated recycling of potentially outdated datasets and findings to support new theoretical publications, such as systematic reviews or anecdotal reflections. To best support instructor-researchers, universities and their individual departments should moreover strive to clearly discern between what is a strict ethical requirement for primary research versus what is an optional recommendation for ethically sound enquiry. Addressing these and further questions, in my view, represents a promising start to the creation of a more accessible and inclusive research environment for pre-sessional practitioners of EAP.

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Scholarship on our own terms: evaluating the impact of an EAP Teachers' Forum

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a reflective narrative and evaluation of an example of co-constructed grassroots EAP (English for Academic Purposes) practitioner development, Teachers' Forums (TFs). In line with the theme of this special issue, rather than examining the approach in isolation, we aim to describe the specific contexts from which it became possible, evaluate the boundaries of its impact on our practice and consider its future and relevance to other contexts. Underpinning this evaluation is our ambivalence towards defining this approach as scholarship, which we have tried to convey in the title – the tension of wanting to engage in scholarship *on our own terms* while working within contexts which may simultaneously afford, reward, ignore and obstruct this**.** To develop our evaluation, we drew on elements of collaborative autoethnography (e.g., Rolinska et. al., 2021) to systematically reflect on the development of TFs. This included a reflection on the specific contexts which made them possible, the often tacit ethos that underpinned their development as well as the various impacts they had on our EAP practice. After providing a narrative of the development of the TFs, this paper presents four broad strands of evaluation, drawing on a range of social theories for additional insights: the ethos of the TFs, their role as part of our EAP teacher development ecosystem, the extent they can be considered a form of critical professional development and the risks and rewards of framing them as scholarship.

KEYWORDS: dialogic teacher development, teacher agency, contexts of scholarship, critical professional development, collaborative autoethnography

INTRODUCTION

This article provides a reflective narrative and evaluation of an example of co-constructed grassroots EAP (English for Academic Purposes) practitioner development, Teachers' Forums (TFs). These are regular semi-formal meetings where teachers can come together to reflect on their practice and are explained in more detail in the section 'Developing the Teachers' Forums'. In line with the theme of this special issue, rather than examining the approach in isolation, we aim to describe the specific contexts from which it became possible, evaluate the boundaries of its impact on our practice and consider its future and relevance to other contexts. Also pertinent to this special issue is our ambivalence towards defining this approach as scholarship, which we have tried to convey in the title – the tension of wanting to engage in scholarship *on our own terms* while working within contexts which may simultaneously afford, reward, ignore and obstruct this.

All three authors of this piece, Jeni, Rob and Wil, were involved in the TFs and it is our experiences and interpretations that we share here. We were all colleagues at the same institution in which the TFs took place, but Rob has since moved to a new position in a different part of the UK. After giving a presentation about the forums at a *BALEAP Professional Interest Meeting on EAP Teacher Education* (Driscoll et. al., 2022), we discussed a shared desire to reflect further on TFs and the theme of this special issue, with its focus on understanding the contexts of scholarship, provided the impetus – and all-important deadline – to develop our ideas further.

The methodology for this article was inspired by the ways that collaborative autoethnography has been recently used by EAP practitioners to explore their working contexts (e.g. Rolinska et al., 2021). Collaborative autoethnography (CAE) is an approach to research whereby a group of researchers collectively explore and analyse their personal experiences in order to understand broader cultural, social or organisational implications (Chang, 2016). After securing ethical approval, the first stage was to generate the stimulus for reflection and so we took as a starting point some of the questions included in the call for submissions, replacing 'scholarship' with 'TFs':

- How has our context influenced the journey of the TFs?
- What lessons have we learnt from conducting or trying to conduct the TFs in our context?
- How might we make the TFs more inclusive?
- What approaches and contexts can or should be developed to increase the impact of the TFs?

(Adapted from *The Language Scholar*)

We then recorded a one-hour online discussion between the three of us and then individually watched back the recording and made notes of recurring themes or points we felt especially relevant to the broad theme of this special issue: the contexts of scholarship in EAP. A key feature of CAE is questioning and commenting on each other's reflections to prompt deeper reflection. So, through weekly online meetings we compared and discussed our notes and themes, refining these into the four sections of evaluation included in this article: the ethos of the TFs, their role as part of the EAP teacher development ecosystem, the extent they can be considered a form of critical professional development and the risks and rewards of framing them as scholarship. First though, we begin with the story of how the TFs emerged and developed.

IN SEARCH OF EAP PEDAGOGY

The setting for the TFs is the Language Centre of a large UK university. The Language Centre is located in a professional services department with all teachers on teaching-only contracts. When the TFs were created, scholarship was not included in workload allocation and the only opportunities to engage in this was in our own time. These features of the Language Centre in some ways characterise a 'support service' approach to EAP, which views its role as 'language acquisition for general proficiency development' with an emphasis on revenue generation, in contrast to approaches which view EAP as a research-informed activity (Ding and Bruce, 2017, p.7). We feel it is noteworthy that the term 'EAP' did not consistently feature in names of teaching roles, marketing or courses, although the centre is accredited by the EAP professional association BALEAP.

This lack of EAPness can be partly explained by the fact that in recent years the Language Centre had devoted a significant part of its resources to teaching General English, competing for students in the market with private language schools. However, a recent departmental review had shifted our focus away from being a profit-making department supporting students who speak English as an additional language towards providing language and skills support to *all* students enrolled in academic study at the university. Our sense was that discussions about EAP pedagogy were vital in addressing these changes, yet deficit and essentialising views of the purpose of language teaching in HE (e.g. Wingate, 2015) seemed to remain alongside ever-present underlying fears about the long-term future of the Language Centre in the marketized HE context.

As such, the remit and evaluative structures of the Language Centre were oriented more towards administration, logistics and policy concerns than pedagogic matters with team meetings and management discourse heavily weighted towards concerns such as student numbers, timetabling and institutional policy updates. This situation is not unique to the Language Centre, with studies of EAP teachers in other UK contexts reporting administratively-focused inductions and lack of time for a consideration of pedagogy (e.g. Campion, 2016, Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). If, as Taylor (2022) suggests, EAP practitioners share a collective identity as 'effective teachers', the reality of our situation seemed to take this for granted and did not encourage us to question or develop our knowledge and skills as EAP practitioners specifically. As we mentioned in many of our discussions preparing this article, the basic issue was that there was very little space for us to talk about our EAP teaching. That was why we decided to set up the TFs.

DEVELOPING THE TEACHERS' FORUMS

The TFs were initially organised by and intended for teachers on the Language Centre's in-sessional provision, in which EAP teachers work closely with specific academic departments or individual programmes across the university to design and teach contextually-relevant, discipline-specific EAP courses. This involves a range of complex tasks including liaising with subject teachers and programme managers, collecting and analysing student work, observing lectures and analysing communicative practices in the disciplines – all traits of EAP as a research informed activity engaging with disciplinary practices (Ding and Bruce, 2017). As in-sessional teachers, the three of us all found this engagement with often unfamiliar disciplinary practices to be stimulating and empowering while also at times isolating and uncertain. Difficulties gaining access to information about departmental practices, having the main responsibility for advertising our optional courses to busy students, and an occasional sense of being an imposter in other departments. This led to many of us wondering, 'am I doing this right?', echoing more recent descriptions of in-sessional EAP as 'ill-defined' and with 'fuzzy' boundaries (Tibbetts and Chapman, 2023, p.5). The limited opportunity to share or develop our practice within the support service-oriented Language Centre meant that while we were building individual expertise, there was a need to create spaces where challenges could be discussed and expertise could be developed collectively, giving rise to the emergence of the forums.

To get the forums started, the initial invitation email was sent out by Jeni, an experienced member of the Language Centre, to in-sessional EAP teachers only, with the following instructions:

Task

- You should prepare to present:
    - 1 example of something that worked well
    - 1 example of something that didn't work so well

Format

- Each teacher presents individually followed by Q&A / group discussion

Timing

- 10 minutes each including Q&A

During the session, one person took on the role of facilitator to set the running order and make sure everyone had equal opportunity to contribute.

After the first few iterations of the forums, however, we found that they took on a life of their own and the structure began to evolve. The individual turns were tending to take somewhat longer than the allocated 10 minutes, and teachers were using the forums in a variety of different ways. People went beyond simply sharing examples of their teaching to offer different types of contributions, such as explorations of new pedagogical approaches, challenging classroom puzzles or thought-provoking comments from students. To reflect these new developments, we broadened the scope of potential contributions and extended the time limit. Also, to make the forums more inclusive we decided to extend the invitation to all teachers in the Language Centre rather than just the in-sessional teachers. Thus, at the time of writing, the instructions are as follows:

Task

- Prepare to talk about something related to your teaching. You are free to choose whatever you want with the aim of promoting reflective discussion on your practice. Previous contributions have included:
    - An example of something that worked / didn't work so well
    - A puzzle / challenge / problem you are facing
    - A thought-provoking experience from your everyday practice
    - Ideas for future projects / approaches

Format

- Each teacher presents individually followed by Q&A / group discussion
- Facilitator sets running order and chairs the forum

Timing

- 15 minutes each including Q&A

This brings us to the end of the narrative of the development of the TFs. The remainder of the article presents our analysis and evaluation of the TFs from multiple perspectives.

THE ETHOS OF THE TEACHERS' FORUMS

The ethos of the forum, by which we mean the values and culture, was not something that, until embarking on writing this article, had ever been written down but rather something that had emerged organically. However, during the writing process we decided that attempting to analyse the forum's ethos could be useful, not only to help us further understand why we found them so impactful, but also to allow others to replicate or build on them. We decided to articulate the ethos as a list of adjectives, so initially one member of the group produced an impressionistic list of characteristics they believed were integral to the forum's ethos based on the discussions we had been having as part of the collaborative autoethnography process. These were then read and commented on asynchronously by the other two members and finally refined via dialogue and consensus into a definitive list. Here we should also acknowledge the theoretical frameworks of dialogic and critical pedagogy (Alexander, 2018; Freire, 1970/1996) which although we have not used directly, have undoubtedly provided some of the conceptual knowledge used to formulate them. It is important to emphasise that the ethos set out below is not intended to be a prescription of how the forums should be, but rather a description of how they currently are, and a work in progress.

Defining characteristics of the ethos

- *pedagogical* (what we share emerges from our teaching practice and we are interested in matters of pedagogy, which includes the use of theory and empirical research to help understand our contributions)
- *dialogic* (ideas are shared and explored through dialogue)
- *reflective* (the format encourages critical reflection on pedagogical beliefs and practices)
- *supportive* (teachers feel free to share ideas and experiences without judgement and feedback is constructive)
- *collaborative* (forums promote the sharing of knowledge and have the potential to lead to future collaborative projects)
- *teacher-led* (the forum is run by teachers and free from top-down control)

- *equitable* (everyone's contribution is given equal time and status and institutional hierarchies do not apply)
- *non-prescriptive* (teachers are free to decide how they wish to use the space)
- *action-oriented* (forum contributions both emerge from and feed into our teaching practice)

After coming up with these adjectives, we wondered whether applying a more systematic theoretical framework might provide a deeper layer of understanding. Other research exploring the nature of CPD has focused mainly on the *form* and *content* of the activities (e.g. Parkhouse et. al., 2023; Basturkmen, 2019) but we felt that a large part of what makes the forums successful covered aspects such as the nature of the interaction and the power relations between the participants. As such we turned to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), drawing on Halliday's 'context of situation' (1985, p.12) to provide additional insights into the impact of the forums on our practice:

Field (what is happening, the subject matter)

- *EAP pedagogy, critical reflection and knowledge sharing*: The field of our discussions was specifically focused on EAP pedagogy, including our teaching practices, methodologies, approaches, theoretical knowledge and classroom experiences. It is important to note that the specific aspects of EAP pedagogy being focused on were chosen by the forum participants themselves (i.e. the field was non-prescriptive). Critical reflection and knowledge sharing were also a large part of what happened in the forum, which can also be said to fall under the field.

Tenor (who is participating, their roles, their relationships and social distance)

- *EAP teachers, peers/colleagues/friends, non-hierarchical*: Although we may have had different levels of experience as EAP teachers, different roles within the department and varying degrees of familiarity with each other on a personal level, we were all colleagues and participating in this forum on an equal footing in our role as EAP teachers, with everyone having the same opportunity to present their ideas. This meant that interactions were collegial, inclusive and free from hierarchical constraints. The fact that the forums were teacher-led produced a peer-to-peer dynamic and a sense of collective ownership among the participants rather than a top-down, hierarchical structure where participants might have felt disempowered.

Mode (how communication is taking place)

- *Oral presentation, Q&A, group discussion, sharing of lesson materials, online messaging*: Generally, the turns would begin with an oral presentation supplemented by the lesson materials as a visual aid. This was followed by semi-formal Q&A and freer, more exploratory

> forms of dialogue, including online messaging in the meeting chat. Overall, dialogue was the most common mode of communication and even the more monologic presentational elements were always with a view to generating discussion.

From our SFL analysis of the forums we realised that the field, tenor and mode all contributed to their success. The opportunity to share and reflect on our EAP teaching practice *on our own terms* filled an important gap in our professional development at the Language Centre. Teachers talking about teaching may not seem particularly unusual and certainly not revolutionary, but in our context it did actually feel like that.

TEACHERS' FORUMS WITHIN THE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM

In our discussions about how the TFs have impacted our practice we often referred to them as part of a range of other developmental activities within the Language Centre and beyond, referred to here as a 'teacher development ecosystem'. Within the Language Centre, a key comparison for all of us was the EAP Journal Club (JC). This was set up by the same people, in-sessional teachers, and at roughly the same time as the TFs in response to what we felt was the need for more opportunities within Language Centre structures to engage with our professional-academic field of EAP and to foreground EAP knowledge. JCs were designed with a similar ethos to the TFs, sharing many aspects of their tenor and mode: teacher-led, collegial and dialogic group discussions. The JCs met roughly once a month throughout the year to discuss an EAP-related journal article, suggested by members of the Language Centre. This also operated on our own terms, with no workload allocation and timed during lunch breaks.

Compared to the TFs, the field of the JCs was one step removed from our individual teaching practice and while we often moved the discussion between the theoretical claims of journal articles and our own teaching contexts, the focus was more theoretical and oriented towards the journal article. Another field-related difference between the TFs and JCs was that while our discussions in the TFs tended to be more focused outwards, towards making sense of the disciplines we were working with, e.g., Dentistry, Urban Planning, Computer Science, the discussions in the JCs looked inwards, towards EAP, for example engaging with corpus methods, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) or EAP teacher identity. As regulars at both TFs and JCs we found these differences complementary, with contributions in TFs prompting suggestions for articles to read in JCs, and discussion in JCs referencing and building on discussions in TFs. We feel that the interaction between these two activities – moving between theory-oriented and practice-oriented – allowed us to develop greater confidence in not only our practice but also how it can engage with and speak back to the academic field of EAP, also recognised in the Language Scholar's manifesto (Ding et. al., 2018). While we felt they were complimentary, the JCs were generally less well attended than the TFs, despite sharing a similar tenor and mode. A possible explanation for this is that while the TFs were grounded in everyday practice, JCs may have been seen as being one step removed from the immediate concerns of being an 'effective teacher' (Taylor, 2022), or perhaps the additional time commitment required to read an article before attending was off putting.

In addition to the impact on us as a group of teachers, the TFs played a role in our individual scholarship journeys in different ways. For example, Rob had been reading about SFL for a while (Thompson, 2004), and had discussed a few SFL-related articles at the JCs (e.g. Caplan, 2019; Monbec, 2018) but had yet to incorporate this theory in his materials. He used the TFs to share his aspirations to do this, sharing initial ideas and then, later, the materials he had produced. These sessions allowed him to articulate his understanding of SFL and share his concerns and excitement about the potential he felt it offered. His contributions interested two other teachers, who contacted him after the TFs to discuss and eventually trial and review the materials. The interest from colleagues and subsequent opportunities to discuss and develop his initial idea inspired Rob to describe this experience in more detail in a blog post (Playfair, 2022) and as a result of the post, was asked to contribute to a cross-institutional collaboration, by contributing to a blog post on learning about SFL (Monbec, 2022). In this example, the impact of the TFs was to create a supportive space to articulate and share his professional hopes and concerns and inspire him to share these more widely with a professional community interested in applications of SFL.

TEACHERS' FORUMS AS *CRITICAL* PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Our discussions indicated a general reluctance to label the forums *professional development* (PD), which we associated with a managerial, one-size-fits-all approach, where teachers are positioned as passive recipients of decontextualised knowledge (we later discovered that many others share this view, e.g. Kohli et al. 2015 and Parkhouse et al. 2023). This top-down approach to PD resembles Freire's (1970/1996, p.52) 'banking model' of education where students are treated as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge that is 'detached from reality' and 'completely alien to [their] existential experience'. In contrast to the banking model, the TFs, based on dialogue and emerging from our own teaching contexts, seemed to share many of the features of Freire's (1996, p.60) 'problem-posing' education. As such, we turned to Freire, as well as more recent literature on c*ritical* PD (e.g.

Kohli et al. 2015; Parkhouse et. al., 2023), to see whether that might provide a useful framework for understanding the TFs.

One of the key features of Freire's critical pedagogy is that education is a form of *praxis*, that is, 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (Freire, p.33). As far as reflection is concerned, the TFs, undoubtedly, provide a space for us to reflect on our realities by giving us the freedom to decide what we choose to share in the forums. Furthermore, although action is not explicitly encouraged, our discussions revealed numerous examples of the TFs' potential to lead to action, including experiments with classroom activities, exploration of theoretical approaches and the undertaking of group scholarship projects. The very fact that we are writing this paper is testament to the TFs' potential for transformative action. Reflecting on this, we feel that a move to raise more explicit awareness of the possibilities for action by adding a final group discussion stage focusing on possible actions could further enhance the forums' transformative potential.

While the forums incorporated reflection and action successfully, another important element of Freire's praxis is that it should explicitly address systems of oppression and encourage participants to recognise their role within these systems (Parkhouse et al., 2023). The goal is to develop a *critical consciousness* that can enable participants to identify the root causes of oppressive systems by making connections to broader socio-political and historical realities, thus empowering them to challenge these systems. Reflecting on the forums, we realised that there have been multiple occasions where people's contributions have led to discussions of political issues, in particular regarding the marginalised position of in-sessional teachers within the university. Issues have included the structural barriers that some of us faced when liaising with subject tutors; and the perception of being on a 'hamster wheel' of teaching and assessment throughout the year with little time for reflection, development or scholarship. However, although political structures at an institutional level were discussed, our lack of an explicitly critical approach meant that we made no conscious attempt to explore the root causes of these issues more deeply. Furthermore, many of our contributions did not critically examine power dynamics, as we were simply sharing our lesson materials and asking for feedback. Parkhouse et al. (2023) warn that PD that fails to adopt a critical perspective runs the risk of legitimising existing inequities, excluding the student voice and reinforcing deficit narratives. This led us to reflect that by their very nature the TFs lack the students' perspective and in future we could place more focus on discussing potential issues facing students such as excessive workloads and deficit perspectives about their abilities.

Revisiting the ‘context of situation’ analysis, we felt that the forums’ *mode* and *tenor* were closely aligned with critical pedagogy principles in that they were dialogic and teacher-led, but that the *field* still required more explicit focus on integrating student perspectives, examining power relations and exploring the broader socio-political and historical realities that shape our contexts. These gaps echo previous critiques of critical PD studies, often found to be lacking in either in-depth political analysis or a problem-posing approach (Parkhouse et al. 2019). To address this, although we would not want to compromise the TF’s non-prescriptive ethos by making impositions regarding the content of the teachers’ contributions, critical perspectives could still be feasibly built into the dialogic process, by, for example, including asking questions related to the broader socio-political context in the discussion stage. Overall, we believe that adopting a critical PD approach can provide a useful direction in which to develop the TFs and unlock their potential for empowering EAP practitioners to challenge the status quo.

TEACHERS’ FORUMS AS SCHOLARSHIP

The key theme in this special issue is scholarship in EAP, which led us to reflect on what engaging in scholarship means for us as EAP practitioners and the extent to which TFs could be considered as a form of scholarship. From a wide range of possible definitions, rather than subscribe to one in particular, we have taken an eclectic approach to identify aspects of scholarship which most accurately capture our experience and aspirations. It also became clear from our discussions and reflections that we did not share identical notions of scholarship but that this in itself was not particularly surprising or problematic for us. A key point to emerge from our discussions was that scholarship carries different meanings for each of us and is influenced by our professional contexts, experiences of teaching and scholarship and our individual scholarly interests. A further theme was how scholarship can be manifest in different ways, ranging from more formal, public activities such as publishing a research-based paper to examples of less public and more informal (but no less valuable) practices such as discussing a published article with colleagues. Based on our reflections, the processes of and possibilities for scholarship emerged as various points along clines of formality and publicness, points which we occupy and move between according to our contexts, needs and preferences as well as external factors such as time and resource constraints.

Different definitions of scholarship from the literature struck a chord with us owing to their focus upon reflection (McKinney, 2003), knowledge transfer (Shulman, 2001; Atkinson, 2001) and pedagogical inquiry (Kreber, 2007; Felten, 2013). However, the description of scholarship which spoke to us most markedly was that of the Language Scholar’s Manifesto for the Scholarship of

Teaching and Learning (Ding et al., 2018). The key points below in italics which we felt were particularly evident in our experiences of TFs are taken directly from this manifesto, followed by an explanation as to how these points relate to our evaluation of TFs.

'scholarship is about impact': The impact of the TFs was primarily on us as EAP practitioners, our understanding of our own practices, those of our colleagues and a deeper appreciation of the contexts in which we worked. With the emphasis being upon our teaching, TFs also had an indirect impact upon our students in terms of the design and delivery of courses, materials and activities.

'scholarship that is collegial, collaborative and conversational, but also critical, combative and cautious': The democratic and dialogic nature of TFs provided an informal space where we could openly discuss the challenges we were facing in our teaching, whilst at the same time using our experience to challenge our thinking and EAP practice and learn collectively from our mistakes.

'scholarship is a powerful tool for language educators': Setting up TFs and making them a regular activity, open to all teachers has been transformative in giving EAP pedagogy a more prominent place on the agenda in our context.

These strands of the manifesto are particularly relevant to our analysis and reflections on TFs as a form of and space for scholarship. However, it also became apparent that there were certain aspects of the manifesto where we felt TFs do not currently align but could develop further. As mentioned earlier, TFs have the potential to include more explicit student focus and involvement. In fact, it could be argued that teachers talking about teaching in TFs without including students in that conversation is somewhat remiss. Furthermore, in seeking closer alignment with the maxim that '*students deserve the best knowledge and understanding we can muster when teaching',* involving students in shaping that knowledge can provide valuable and powerful input.

In arguing that TFs can be seen as cultivating, encouraging and enacting scholarship, it is not to suggest that this is necessarily problem-free. Reflecting on some of the challenges of this position, a key question was whether we want TFs to be seen as a form of scholarship or not and whether the potential rewards of framing TFs as scholarship outweigh the possible risks.

In terms of potential rewards, the informal and open-to-all nature of TFs can foster a broader definition of and involvement in scholarship. TFs can demystify scholarship and create a more inclusive environment for scholarship, providing a space for 'easing into' scholarship through engagement with more concrete teaching practice. TFs promote knowledge-sharing amongst fellow EAP practitioners and recognition of teachers' expertise at all stages of their EAP careers. A further possible reward of TFs is that they can provide a springboard/sounding board for other forms of scholarship and collaborations, both within the team and with colleagues in other institutions. Overall, we reflected on the positive impact of TFs in their contribution to our EAP teaching practice, EAP scholarship and EAP teacher identity.

In considering the risks of positioning TFs as a form of scholarship, one outcome could be that this creates a basis of division amongst practitioners. The term 'scholarship' could act as a deterrent to some who identify with 'EAP teaching-only roles' (Taylor, 2022, p.277) and might thereby discourage participation in TFs. Placing TFs under a scholarship umbrella could also bring greater expectations for teachers such as further outputs and the pressure to publish or present. TFs as a form of scholarship could also be prone to the threat of managerialism whereby TFs can become co-opted as a tick-box exercise, possibly leading to more surface-level scholarship akin to 'sheep-dip' PD. Another potential risk of TFs as scholarship is that they could become absorbed and governed by more formal management-led systems and policies. Not only might this lead to a loss of teacher agency and ownership of TFs, but such a top-down approach to the forums and management shaping TFs as scholarship would go against the very ethos of TFs.

Overall, the longevity of TFs in our context indicates that the rewards of framing TFs as scholarship outweigh the risks. TFs lend themselves to involving elements of scholarship, to greater or lesser extents, and still leave room to not be defined in this way. Our reflections have repeatedly highlighted the need to engage in scholarship on some level to be better equipped to do our jobs as discipline-specific in-sessional EAP teachers. This is borne out by the BALEAP TEAP framework which states there is an expectation that teachers engage in scholarship in order to be a better-informed EAP practitioner with knowledge of their students' disciplinary practices (BALEAP, 2022). The need to create a space for this to happen was a significant part of the initial impetus for setting up TFs. The TF/scholarship intersection was a recurring theme in our reflections, as well as the observation that as TFs have evolved, the role of TFs in relation to scholarship has also evolved.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on the TFs, we believe they have achieved their original goal of creating a space to explore and develop our EAP pedagogy. Our reflections have raised a number of points which can aid our understanding of why TFs have prevailed and their potential for growth. Firstly, TFs have functioned as a form of teacher-led professional development, allowing us to experience the benefits of simply talking about teaching with our fellow teachers. Further analysis suggests that the grassroots nature of the forums and the equal relationship between participants can position teachers as *agents* rather than *objects* of change (Kohli et al. 2015). Indeed, TFs have offered us routes to action, ranging from slight amendments to the design of an EAP teaching activity, countering the official positioning of EAP within our institutional context and enacting more scholarship-oriented roles which were not part of our official job descriptions, not least collaborating on this article. In addition to addressing challenges, TFs have been able to accentuate the positive aspects of our in-sessional work by alleviating the isolation which can occur in such a context, building an academic community within and beyond our institution, and strengthening our professional identity.

As our analysis has shown, TFs are not an isolated activity nor a panacea for teacher development – they stem from and feed into the particular contexts of our EAP teaching practice and our individual orientations. Setting them up has allowed us to reprioritise the knowledge, values and discourses which we felt were being taken for granted, representing an effort to reframe EAP *on our own terms*. Possible future directions might include introducing more explicit ways of incorporating students into discussions, adding critical perspectives to the task and format and foregrounding the possibilities for action in discussions. However, the actual way in which TFs evolve in future will be shaped by the teachers who participate in them, and in response to contexts in which they work. We hope that this article will inspire some practitioners to engage with TFs on *their* own terms and develop the TFs in response to their own contexts.

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To embrace, or not to embrace scholarship? Autoethnographic reflections of two EAP practitioners' experiences in the Argentinian context

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ABSTRACT

A considerable body of research exists on English for Academic Purposes teaching and research. Despite its global development, researchers have reported a significant lack of attention to the EAP practitioner and practitioner-related issues (e.g., Ding and Bruce, 2017). Therefore, this piece of work recounts two Argentinean EAP practitioners' experiences, mainly in relation to scholarship. Using an autoethnographic approach, we aim to unravel some of the national, institutional and disciplinary contextual conditions that have shaped our scholarship. In doing so, we hope to provide readers with a view of the challenges EAP Argentinean practitioners have to face, as well as to contribute to the emerging literature on EAP practitioners' identity and status.

KEYWORDS: EAP, scholarship, university, practitioners, Argentina

INTRODUCTION

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has become a well-established international academic discipline within the field of Applied Linguistics (Bell, 2021a; Bruce and Ding, 2021; Ding, 2019, 2022; Ding and Bruce, 2017; Hyland, 2019; Hyland and Jiang, 2021). As a disciplinary culture, EAP is identified to be an academic field with a sound theoretical framework based on the contribution of different disciplines, defined research paradigms, as well as communities of practitioners who work in specific cultural, social and institutional contexts across the world. This dynamic interplay between epistemological and cultural elements is, in fact, the foundation of all disciplinary cultures (Becher, 1981, 1989, 1992, 1994; Becher and Trowler, 2001; Becher and Parry, 2005; Christie and Maton, 2011; Hyland, 2000; Krishnan, 2009; Trowler, 2012a, 2012b, 2014a, 2014b; Trowler et al., 2012). Following Becher's (1989) famous metaphor, it is possible to state that EAP should be described not only in terms of its territory (the epistemological basis) but also in terms of its tribes (the participants who inhabit that territory). It is precisely on the latter, EAP practitioners/professionals, that we focus in this paper.

EAP professionals occupy a central role in facilitating university students' development of academic and disciplinary literacies and, therefore, their access to and participation in the discourse community of each disciplinary area (e.g., Bond, 2020; Bruce, 2011; Ding and Bruce, 2017; Hamp-Lyons, 2011; Hyland, 2018, 2019, 2022; Murray, 2016; Pérez-Llantada and Swales, 2017). However, despite the scientific status of EAP and the paramount importance of EAP practitioners for their roles not only as teachers (assisting students in literacy development) but also as researchers (constructing knowledge and theory), these scholars do not enjoy, in general, the same recognition, professional respect, and working conditions as scholars in other academic and scientific disciplines (Bell, 2016).

In addition to the institutional and contextual challenges faced by EAP practitioners, it is important to state that there is scant academic literature on EAP professionals coupled with limited literature focusing specifically on the conditions in which they work and attempt to engage in scholarship. Studies have mostly described practitioners' roles (Malik, 2014; Mehta, 2012; Muhrofi-Gunadi, 2016), training needs (Alebaid, 2020), specialized knowledge development (Cheng, 2015), perceptions and teaching practices (Dwee et al., 2016), teaching beliefs (Alexander, 2012), teaching views (Campion, 2016), decision-making processes (Kuzborska, 2011), cognitions and practices (Atai and Taherkhani, 2018), emotions and identities (Derakhshan et al., 2023), education needs (Basturkmen, 2019), knowledge base, practices and challenges (Kaivanpanah et al., 2021b), professionalization through apprenticeship (Ghanbari and Rasekh, 2012), competences, practices and professional development (Kaivanpanah et al., 2021a), as well as professional identity construction (Atai et al., 2022; Tao and Gao, 2018; Trent, 2024).

Previous studies and theoretical discussions have also focused on some of the problems faced by EAP practitioners in the construction of their academic and institutional status. EAP professionals tend to be perceived as "butlers" (Raimes, 1991), "intellectually vacuous" (Turner, 2004), and "linguistic service technicians" (Hadley, 2013). As a disciplinary area, EAP has also been depicted as peripheral and marginal (Bell, 2021b; Bond, 2022; Ding, 2022; Ding and Bruce, 2017; le Roux, 2022; Sizer, 2019; Tibbetts and Chapman, 2023). Even when EAP practitioners' academic status and roles have been portrayed as variable across different contexts (Charles and Pecorari, 2015; Ding and

Bruce, 2017) and the field has been characterised as geographically diverse and heterogeneous (Bruce, 2021), few studies have described the Latin American situation (Holmes and Celani, 2006; Salager-Meyer et al., 2016). What is more, little is known about the EAP practitioner status and the EAP field in Argentina.

Despite the progress made in this new line of research focused on EAP practitioners, information regarding the obstacles and challenges in their attempt to engage in scholarship is limited. More specifically, to the best of our knowledge, there is no published study that explores the contextual conditions in which EAP practitioners seek to engage in scholarship in Argentina, especially as revealed from stories told by practitioners themselves. Therefore, adopting an autoethnographic approach, we aim at voicing our experiences in our way to scholarship in two Argentinean public universities, more specifically, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (UNC) and Universidad Nacional de Río Cuarto (UNRC). We hope that the description of our personal experiences from an autoethnographic perspective (Ellis et al., 2011) can shed light on the cultural experiences of EAP Practitioners in Argentinean national universities in an attempt to better understand the EAP disciplinary culture in our country. With this in mind, we will first present the wider context for our descriptive narratives so that we can bring to light the conditions in which our scholarship has developed. We will outline the external forces that have largely influenced our scholarship and have paved the way to our present position as EAP Practitioners. We will then narrate, in first person, our own autoethnographic accounts. In so doing, we hope to provide our colleagues with a view of the challenges EAP Argentinean practitioners have to face.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

In Argentinian universities, as in the rest of the world, teachers engage in diverse practices, science and technology being one of the main activities which directly impact on the situations that define universities (Koncurat and Montenegro, 2003). Argentinian universities' function, then, is oriented not only to professional and vocational training but also to research. In fact, all throughout Latin America, the vast majority of the scientific structure belongs to universities, which host most of the research activities and scientists (Altbach, 2009). The major role of universities in science is, indeed, one of the central practices that define them institutionally and socially, as the university does not only transmit knowledge but is also responsible for the production, management, processing, application and popularization of knowledge as well as for the generation of new ideas and discoveries (Duderstadt, 2010; López Segrera, 2006). Not only do universities generate scientific knowledge and produce technological developments but also they are, in most countries, the main institutions for the training of researchers and scientists, a basic function of universities (Altbach, 2009; Escotet et al., 2010). Yet, Argentinian teachers face different difficulties to balance research and teaching given the many responsibilities and tasks required by universities, depending on the hierarchical position teachers have and their working conditions ("simple", part, or full-time). These challenges, and the pressure to overcome them, become a serious problem, especially considering the system of external and internal institutional evaluation of universities based on their performance in research, teaching and outreach, implemented since the enactment of the Higher-education Federal Law in 1995 (Fernández Lamarra, 2007). In addition to coping with unreal work demands, university teachers have to orchestrate their own motivation with the lack of resources and insufficient funds, resulting from the economic crisis as well as the government's restrictions on public spending required by the World Bank's neoliberal policies (de Sousa Santos, 2007; Escotet et al., 2010; Fernández Lamarra, 2007; Leher, 2010; López Segrera, 2006), a world-wide phenomenon that started in the 90s and a major concern in developing countries like Argentina.

The UNC context

Globalization and, in turn, internationalization in Higher Education have led to the use of English as a medium of instruction. In fact, English for Academic Purposes Units have become part of universities in English and non-English speaking countries (Hadley, 2015; Hyland and Shaw, 2016). In the UNC, and as a direct consequence of globalization, foreign language instruction became mandatory in the curriculum of its different schools. In 1999, by means of the 167-1999 Resolution of the Honorable Consejo Superior, the university's highest governing authority, the subject *Módulo de Idioma Inglés* was created. In one section of this regulatory text, reference is made to the national and international context of globalisation and to the new scientific-professional profiles that "in this new state of affairs" society demands. This statement makes it possible to form a wide picture of the ideological, economic, social and political context in which the *Módulo de Idioma Inglé*s originated, which undoubtedly has influenced the positioning of EAP as a field, and consequently, the positioning of the EAP practitioner. In another section of the regulation, it is stated that the *Módulo de Idioma Inglés* should not exceed one year in duration and that the maximum time stipulated leads to the need to prioritise the knowledge and skills to be developed. Thus, Article 3 of this Resolution establishes that English language teaching "shall be primarily oriented towards the development of reading comprehension". Besides, Article 7 states that the different academic units should include the language module as compulsory for those entering from the year 2000 onwards. In addition, Article 2 states the School of Languages should be in charge of administering the teaching of the subject; therefore, the EAP Department was physically located at this school. The EAP professors were then ELT professionals appointed by the School of Languages and were asked to teach in different schools. As can be seen, EAP as an undergraduate compulsory subject has a young tradition in the UNC context.

According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), English for Academic Purposes courses can take place in four different situations, determined by the course contents and methods. The subject *Módulo de Idioma Inglés* can be said to be within situation 4, since all subject courses are taught in the national language (Spanish), but English is important for auxiliary reasons (academic studies). Within situation 4, Martínez (2011) identifies what she calls the “Latinate situation”. In this particular context, the practitioner is usually a non-native speaker of English (most of the times a native speaker of Spanish) and teaches EAP in Spanish. The modality adopted in most academic units for undergraduate students is reading comprehension. This is due to different causes: the need to facilitate university students’ access to bibliographic materials written in English, the need to optimize the teaching-learning situation, since classes are usually overcrowded to try anything else (Salager-Meyer et al., 2016), the lack of institutional policies, the lack of interest from the university’s authorities and the lack of funding/budget.

As a consequence of the above, EAP as a profession tends to enjoy a low status in the UNC. Even when “foreign language reading courses complement the conceptual work carried out in all the subjects included in the degree course, since they are aimed at the integral formation of the student” (Klett, 2019, p.40) (our translation), the central role that EAP Practitioners play in facilitating students' access to and participation in the discourse community of each subject area (Murray, 2016) is frequently downplayed.

The UNRC context

A similar situation is identified at Universidad Nacional de Río Cuarto (UNRC), a much smaller and younger university than Universidad Nacional de Córdoba. English has been taught as a mandatory subject in different course syllabi for the development of disciplinary literacies at undergraduate level since the foundation of the university early in the 70s (1971). At this time, the English Teaching Program and the English Bachelor were not academic majors offered by the university, English classes being taught only in the first career programs offered by the university, in disciplines such as engineering and agriculture.

At present, most of the EAP courses are administered by the Department of Languages, School of Humanities, to careers in the social sciences and humanities, natural and physical sciences, veterinary and agriculture, as well as formal sciences. Except for the School of Engineering and the School of Economy, which have their own EAP teacher staff, the Department of Languages teaches EAP undergraduate courses as a “service” to most of the careers at Universidad Nacional de Río Cuarto. EAP, together with other Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) (French, German, Italian and Portuguese) are, in fact, one of the main teaching activities in the Department of Languages, School of Humanities. The institutional area in which all these languages are organized is internally and informally referred to as “Support Area” (*Área de Apoyo*) within the Department of Languages. This “area” has never been officially recognized and has never been granted official status within the School of Humanities, regardless of the importance, the role and the potential it has across the whole university. Despite the efforts and the presentation of a project by LSP teachers in 2013 requesting the inclusion of the area in the institutional structure of the Department of Languages, eleven years later the situation remains exactly the same.

The instrumental relevance of LSP, as claimed by the university itself, is the need to respond to globalization in both academic and work communities and guarantee good-quality scientific and academic education at undergraduate as well as graduate level. In addition, as argued by Hyland (2018), LSP reading and writing courses are, in general, the only opportunities university students have for receiving explicit instruction and developing academic literacies with the assistance and scaffolding of teachers, a competence that can be transferred to other subjects and learning situations. This, it is argued, will enable the university to compete with international standards for the work market. However, to date the institutional policies fail to guarantee and protect, both academically and professionally, LSP teachers and their work, for the reasons we will discuss later in this work.

As for English in particular, all EAP courses are focused on reading at undergraduate level, with the aim of helping students access disciplinary-specific literature. This emphasis on single-skill courses oriented to the development of reading competencies at undergraduate level has been a traditional practice not only in Argentina but also all throughout Latin America (Salager-Meyer et al., 2016). At UNRC, EAP courses are also lectured at graduate level, centred on the teaching of both the reading and writing of academic and scientific genres, with the purpose of helping research apprentices, teachers and researchers develop literacies for participating in international scientific communities by publishing in prestige journals, for example. Teaching scientific writing and reading in Doctorate and Master Programs in different disciplines is, in fact, a situation common to many national universities in Argentina (Porto, 2014). At UNRC most undergraduate and graduate courses are targeted to English for Academic Purposes, although more and more courses are oriented now, also, to English for Professional Purposes, particularly at this moment of curriculum changes in the academic syllabi of the different careers.

This development of EAP in both institutions has determined the conditions that shape our disciplinary culture in our universities and, therefore, who we are as EAP Practitioners.

EAP symbolic capital in our universities

Many authors have argued, from a Bourdieusian standpoint, that the EAP field lacks capital (Bell, 2016, 2021a,b; Ding and Bruce, 2017; Ding, 2022; Jones, 2020). More specifically, Bell (2016, 2021a,b) states that in academia "the most obvious manifestation of symbolic capital are those forms of capital linked with formally recognised academic achievement, most typically represented by higher level qualifications" (p.8, 2021b). Therefore, the key forms of cultural capital for most academics are a PhD and peer recognition of scholarly activity and research, two forms of capital from which EAP practitioners tend to be excluded because of their contractual terms and conditions (Bell, 2021a,b). In our country, as other studies have also reported (Courtois and O'Keefe, 2015; Leigh, 2020), when we look at the location of the EAP unit, the contractual status and the subject status, this lack of capital becomes apparent.

In the first place, lack of symbolic capital is revealed in the location (Ding, 2022). The location of the EAP unit in the university impacts on contracts, pay and work conditions (Jones, 2020). Tao and Gao (2018, p.7) add that "the lack of a supportive social and physical environment" promotes professional isolation and consequently, hampers professional identity development.

In UNC, except for the School of Exact Sciences and the School of Agronomy, which have their own EAP unit, the EAP Department, as mentioned above, was located at the School of Languages. For not very clear reasons, it was recently decided to move the department at the *Rectorado*, the office for the university authorities; that is, *Rectorado* is not a "teaching unit" but a "government unit". This transferring has not contributed to helping the EAP staff feel as an integral part of any academic community. Moreover, the shift from on-site teaching to online teaching as a result of the confinement by COVID-19 meant that the course content and assessment needed to be adapted for virtual instruction. This sudden restructuring of the subject paved the way for the definitive adoption of remote teaching in some academic units. Being devoid of a tangible, physical place, the digital realm makes it difficult to work alongside colleagues who resumed the traditional face-to-face instruction. Needless to say, navigating this new "virtual" reality and the fact that the EAP

Department is placed in a site different from the sites where the subject is taught have negatively impacted on the EAP practitioner's identity, since it has deepened the invisibility of the subject and the practitioners themselves.

As for UNRC, the so-called "Support Area", which administers LSP courses to most schools, except for the School of Engineering and the School of Economy, belongs to the Department of Languages in the School of Humanities. The lack of official recognition of the area, as explained before, brings about different academic and administrative problems and obstacles, such as lack of uniform criteria in the subject names and codes, lack of resources to guarantee the necessary staff organization in each subject (at least a senior teacher responsible for the course and an assistant teacher), lack of institutional instruments to protect teachers' rights, lack of resources to protect teachers as well as courses from institutional policies and decisions both in the School of Humanities and in the other schools. In relation to this last point, it is important to say that EAP teachers who teach courses for careers outside the School of Humanities have to struggle against the many times unfair decisions and rules imposed by other schools which are benefited by the "academic service" provided by the School of Humanities.

In both universities, UNC and UNRC, work overload makes us, EAP practitioners, vulnerable. The different schools where EAP is taught take decisions and impose rules which pressure us to accept unfair work practices (le Roux, 2022). For example, we are obliged to respond to different academic calendars in each school; thus, our tasks frequently overlap and interfere with other professional duties. This makes it nearly impossible to fulfil all the mandatory academic requirements. Besides, as EAP practitioners, we are usually left outside the official communicative channels. For instance, we tend not to receive information about institutional support for research funding. Also, as EAP professors, we are not always seen as being real academics (Leigh, 2020). Many times we are not treated equally as the discipline-specific teachers; therefore, we are usually not invited to participate in academic decisions, for example, related to curriculum design. To make matters worse, not only does our area lack official institutional status but it also lacks an office where teachers can meet and different academic and administrative activities can be carried out.

Being placed outside the structure of the schools where the subject is taught contributes to strengthening the view EAP as a "service activity" (Hyland, 2002). Further, it reinforces the perception of EAP Practitioners as service providers. In this position, it is not surprising for us not to be afforded "the same kudos, professional respect and working conditions as academics in other disciplines" (Bell, 2016, p.93). Besides, being located separately from the school where we teach prevents us from building ties with different academic departments. Consequently, it becomes hard to create stronger links with colleagues from different subjects. This marginalised position only adds to “the sense of being undervalued and poorly recognised within institutions” (Jones, 2020, p.101).

In the second place, lack of capital can be seen in the practitioners’ contractual status (Ding, 2022). Even when EAP in Argentina is not necessary for attracting and maintaining a steady flow of international students (Hadley, 2017 in Bahrami et al., 2019), but a curricular subject, EAP teachers are generally recruited as teaching-only staff (Bahrami et al., 2019).
In the particular case of the Department of Languages for Academic Purposes at UNC, the figure of the full professor is non-existent. To date, the only figure that exists is that of *profesor asistente*. And until 2022, *profesores asistentes* coexisted with teachers employed on casual contracts.
Consequently, the *profesores asistentes* of this Department have to bear many responsibilities: developing all the contents of the syllabus of the subject; carrying out all teaching tasks, both theoretical and practical; designing mid-term and final exams; keeping a record of all the tests done by students; submitting teaching performance reports and chairing examination boards. This irregular situation not only violates the regulations established by the UNC Statute regarding teaching duties, but also significantly increases our workload.

At UNRC, EAP practitioners face similar as well as different work problems. Some have temporary work contracts, though in general this situation is regularised within a relatively short span of time. Most practitioners are part of the permanent staff, that is they have gone through a process of peer evaluation for getting a position at university. However, not all EAP practitioners work full-time in the Department of Languages. In fact, several EAP practitioners are part-time teachers, who divide their work time between the Department of Languages and other institutions. This situation is more complicated considering that in either case (full-time as well as part-time teachers), most EAP practitioners are required to teach both EAP courses and also courses for the English Teaching Program and the English Bachelor. The varied nature of the subjects in which each teacher participates makes work hard, dispersed and overwhelming. Some practitioners have to organise their time to respond to different requirements imposed by different areas other than the Support Area, for instance attending different meetings scheduled during the week, co-working in different courses with several colleagues simultaneously, as well as interacting with students of different backgrounds, ages, disciplines and interests.

When most of our time is spent on lesson planning, course evaluation and fulfilling administrative requirements in both universities, “other material labour which might serve to distinguish us as professionals or academics, such as research, scholarship or writing for publication, must be done in our own time and at our own expense, if it can be done at all” (le Roux, 2022, p.169). As a consequence, being faced with the extra task of trying to engage in research can be quite demanding or even impossible.

In the third place, lack of capital is also exposed in the status of the EAP courses. At UNC, English for Academic Purposes is the only subject that has international exam equivalency. This opens up another issue of debate since, to begin with, an international exam does not necessarily assess the ability to understand specialised disciplinary genres. What is more, in some academic units, the subject is passed by means of a proficiency test, which is usually focused on reading strategies and vocabulary. To make matters worse, equivalence of the subject is also granted to those students who can prove that they have successfully passed some of the internationally recognised exams, such as TOEFL, CAE or CPE, stated in *Ordenanza* 11/2012 by the *Honorable Consejo Superior*.

Moreover, as the literature in the field has echoed, no academic prerequisite to enter the field of EAP is needed (Ding and Bruce, 2017; Ding and Campion, 2016). Consequently, and certainly not exclusively a situation in Argentina, academic colleagues tend to believe that teaching EAP does not require any specialised skills (Murray, 2016). What is particularly striking in our country is that anyone who considers himself/herself to be competent in English believes he/she can teach EAP. This is clearly evidenced in the jury composition, who are supposed to be academic peers in the field, appointed to evaluate candidates for university posts. It has been frequently observed that many times there is only one specialist in EAP and the other two members of the jury are believed to be proficient in English because, for example, they write papers in this language, but have no pedagogical or methodological training in this field. Thus, they can be considered unable to correctly assess the candidates competing for the post. Another commonplace practice is that universities appoint English teachers of academic backgrounds other than the EAP field, thus having as jury teachers specialised in English history, sociolinguistics, or general English, for example. These teachers, however respected in their fields, do not have the relevant theory, qualifications and training to assess the specific competences needed for and in the EAP field. In a similar way, the members of the jury assigned to assess the level of proficiency in English by PhD candidates in different fields, for example Biology, Geology, Engineering, are Biologists, Geologists and Engineers, not EAP Practitioners. Similarly, when there is more than one candidate for a post, the jury, even when integrated by EAP Practitioners, tends not to evaluate specialised knowledge (Ferguson, 1997) but seniority in teaching.

A closely related problem at UNRC is that EAP is, literally, a sort of "wildcard" in the Department of Languages. Many times, teachers are told to teach EAP courses as an extra teaching requirement for their position. Once these teachers have got their position, after peer evaluation (contest), they are required to teach EAP courses as an ancillary work prerequisite. However, in the peer evaluation process, these teachers´ resumes are not assessed on the basis of their qualifications and scholarship in the EAP field; nor are the teachers told to teach an EAP oral mock lesson to be evaluated by the jury. Therefore, there are teachers specialised in English History, for example, teaching EAP courses just to fulfil a teaching requirement. These teachers have not developed scholarship in the EAP discipline (and will never do), nor do they do research in the field simply because this is not their area of academic interest and specialization. The institutional underlying assumptions are that anyone can teach EAP and that no academic specialisation is needed to participate in the field, thus denying and ignoring the disciplinary status of EAP in the academy. All of this clearly demonstrates that the authorities who make these kinds of decisions have difficulty in distinguishing EAP from EGP. In Bell's (2021b, p.5) words "for those outside the field, the idea that EAP and General English teaching are much the same thing is pernicious and this misinterpretation continues to persist. Such misunderstandings are a contributory factor to the problems that EAP has faced regarding its academic status in […] Higher Education".

As we have argued, EAP practitioners in UNC and in UNRC suffer the consequences that lack of capital entails in different ways. Bell (2016, 2021a, 2021b), Ding and Bruce (2017), and Flowerdew (2019) believe that EAP professionals in Higher Education may raise their academic status and move from the edge to a more central position within academia by upgrading qualifications, engaging more proactively with research and scholarly activity, building stronger ties with academics in other subject areas. The question is how can we, as EAP practitioners, acquire cultural capital through qualifications, research, scholarly activity and build stronger ties with academics in other subject areas when the university itself does not create policies that strengthen the training and professionalisation in our disciplinary culture?

OUR OWN EXPERIENCES

Vignette 1: Daniela

I began to take an interest in ESP when I did *Didáctica Especial II*, a subject in the English Teaching Training course of studies. In this subject, we had to study teaching children in the first semester and teaching EAP in the second semester. I remember reading Barnard and Zemach's chapter about ESP materials design in Tomlinson (2003) that left me with a lifelong interest in the field. After reading the chapter I became aware of the challenges, constraints and opportunities ESP practitioners may encounter when developing tailored in-house materials. More importantly, I became aware of the significance of elaborating materials guided by research supported principles and being informed by subject specialists.

It was a couple of years after my graduation that I had the opportunity to apply for a teacher selection process for English reading comprehension courses at the university. After passing an evaluation, I got a teaching casualised contract to work at the Faculties of Architecture and Psychology. After eight years in a precarious position, I could have access to a permanent post as *profesora asistente*. At this point, I believe it is worth pointing out that I am a member of the Department of English for Academic Purposes, which was located in the Faculty of Languages and is now located in the Rectorado, and teach ESP in two different faculties.

When I entered the field, the goal of the course I was assigned to teach was not to on "exploring the language as a carrier of disciplinary and professional values" (Hyland, 2009, p.203), but on learning "the correct grammar" of English using texts that contain some information about any topic related to the field of study and considered of interest by the teacher. For example, an excerpt from a book about "The Chicago School'' was used to teach the simple past. Therefore, the structures were not examined "in the light of how individual learners will need to use them" (Upton, 2012, p.15) or, what was worse, "as a result of the frequency and importance to the community that employs them" (Hyland, 2009, p.203).

Together with grammar and vocabulary, there was an emphasis, and there still is, on reading strategies. The limitations and weaknesses of this approach became clear as I went deeper into reading about materials design in EAP. By 2006 I decided to continue my studies and applied for the MA in applied linguistics that the Faculty of Languages offered. The MA included a Genre Analysis seminar, in charge of Ileana Martínez, who had studied in Birmingham under the supervision of Tony

Dudley-Evans. This was a really enlightening experience that introduced me to the classics: John Swales, Vijay Bhatia, Ken Hyland, among others. As I felt that the MA program was a bit disarticulated and that many of the courses and seminars did not really interest me, I decided to do the Specialised Texts and Terminology seminar as an external student in another MA program. I was fortunate in that I had the chance to meet two great Argentinian linguists: Inés Kuguel and Guiomar Ciapuscio. It was here that I encountered concepts such as “specialised text”, “term” and approaches such as “multilevel analysis” that, together with the concept of “genre”, provided me with a strong toolkit to engage in in-house materials development from a research-based point of view, and to design activities linked with the disciplinary context, using authentic language data and aiming at raising students’ awareness of the prototypical, disciplinary genres they need to know. These two eye-opening seminars were the beginning of a growing interest in genre analysis and genre-based pedagogy. This interest led to the writing of the MA thesis in which I applied Swales’ CARS model to text analysis. I explored the rhetorical organisation of Discussions Sections of English and Spanish research articles in Psychology and proposed a template for this section in these two languages. Feeling that I did not have all the answers about in-house materials design, I hit upon the idea of starting my PhD studies. The ultimate goal I pursued was to determine the degree of specialisation of the texts in order to establish sound criteria for text selection and sequencing, which can help provide the basis for creating the teaching materials used in my reading comprehension classes. I was fortunate enough to begin working under the supervision of Dr Inés Kuguel. Sadly, Inés suffered from an incurable disease and passed away two years after we began our work together. This unfortunate event coupled with many administrative constraints meant the end of my PhD journey.

It was probably the lack of a doctoral-level qualification and the impossibility of being hired for a tenured position that made me see myself as the poor relations when compared to colleagues from the disciplines in which I teach. This feeling led me to enquire about the possible causes of this disadvantaged position. While trying to voice my concerns that I came across Ding and Bruce’s (2017) “The English for Academic Purposes Practitioner. Operating on the edge of the academia”. Reading this groundbreaking work meant a turning point for my academic studies. It encouraged me to go beyond applied linguistics and see “how Social Theory/ies operates within each of (…) the key EAP elements of the practitioner knowledge-base” (Ding, 2022, p.2). Their influence also encouraged me to thoroughly examine, using their lens, the EAP practitioner positioning at my university. More specifically, I am currently looking into how EAP practitioners implement strategies (from a Bourdieusian perspective) to position themselves in the university field.

In a nutshell, the precarious conditions of my university position, the underprivileged position we occupy in relation to other disciplines, the fragmented identity that started developing as a result of the "dual-dependency", the marginalisation of the field and the pressure to accept unfair work practices, the use and abuse of power by powerful decision-makers within the university and institutional practices that tend to arbitrarily favour those considered to be friends or allies regardless of their academic credentials, encouraged me to "twist the screw the other way" (Ding 2022, p.155). The feeling of being supported by publications on Social Theory has made it possible for me to begin writing about the precarious working conditions of the ESP/EAP practitioners at Universidad Nacional de Córdoba.

3.2. Vignette 2: Verónica

Thinking and reflecting upon my scholarship leads me, immediately and unavoidably, to a metaphor: a rollercoaster. I cannot think of the process in any other way, with ups and downs, the good and the bad, strengths and weaknesses. The metaphor of the rollercoaster reflects not only the institutional challenges I had to face (and therefore the backwards and forwards in my career) but also my own perceptions and emotions struggling with the ambiguities of the system. This is a system that requires university teachers to engage in scholarship (mainly through research and graduate education), but paradoxically at the same time does not guarantee the necessary conditions and policies to help us teachers achieve the required academic goals, and does not adequately reward us for our academic achievements. In this context, we teachers many times wonder whether it is actually worth struggling hard to embrace scholarship, given the lack of support and the not-so-clear and even unfair reward systems. In what follows I will focus on those moments that significantly impacted my academic trajectory, mainly referring to those experiences under adverse circumstances which I could eventually overcome and which most clearly helped me become aware of my identity as an EAP practitioner.

Just like many of my Argentinian colleagues, I got into the field of EAP incidentally in 2003, very young, when I had just got my undergraduate degree as an English teacher. At that time, I did not have a clear idea of what I wanted to do professionally and academically. I even do not remember thinking about this explicitly. In 2003, most probably by inertia, I started the English Bachelor Program after I graduated as an English teacher in 2002. Although I have always been really fond of reading and studying, we were told, at that moment, that doing the Bachelor would give us more qualifications to be university English teachers. I assumed this would be the case, although I was not really thinking and expecting to become a university teacher. But I decided to apply for a temporary position as a teacher assistant. Therefore, immediately after my graduation, I got a 10-hour-a-week contract as a teacher assistant (*Ayudante de primera*), the lowest position in the Argentinian university hierarchy. I also worked in a high-school and in a private institution that offers English lessons to children, teenagers and adults. Saying this simply and shortly, that was when my scholarship journey started, how it all began, though not really consciously. Thinking retrospectively about my scholarship, I can identify graduate education and research as the two main academic activities that really marked my identity as a university teacher and researcher and, in particular, as an EAP practitioner. I will focus on these because both were key in my process into becoming a scholar in the field of EAP.

As for graduate education, still an English Bachelor student, I enrolled in the English Master Program (Applied Linguistics) on campus, this time not really out of inertia but more consciously, with the idea of applying for a permanent position in the Department of Languages (School of Humanities). Graduate certificates are supposed to be valued for university positions in the peer evaluation process (they say). In 2006 I finished the English Bachelor Program and I continued my Master studies. This was a hard process, having three jobs (at university, in a high-school and in a private institution) and doing my best to make time for work, for study, and for personal life. At the moment I was a Master candidate, the Department of Languages did not have policies (not even informal agreements) to help teachers who were doing the Master Program. There was not, literally, any kind of institutional support, despite the requirements imposed by the university for teachers' individual evaluation and for institutional evaluation. Therefore, I was not allowed to ask for some time off work so that I could focus on my studies. I did not receive any help from the institution or from my colleagues. In fact, I was not even exempted from marking exams or teaching some classes, for example. Despite these unfavourable circumstances, I worked hard and I graduated from the Master Program (my own individual achievement, with no institutional support). I do not feel that the Master Program in itself had an impact in my academic life, but it did mean, for me, a sort of bridge, a way into the very beginning of the development of my academic identity, a stage in my professional life that I will develop in the next paragraphs.

The subsequent period in my scholarship is what really shaped my place in the academic world. Still an English Master student, I was admitted in the PhD Program in Language Sciences (Applied Linguistics) at Universidad Nacional de Córdoba in 2011. I enrolled in the program when I was granted a five-year scholarship by CONICET (National Scientific and Technical Research Council), the government's research institution that is the main official support for scientific development at national universities in Argentina. Different from the Bachelor and the Master stages of my scholarship process, applying for the PhD program was an act of complete self-awareness and conviction, firmly rooted in my willingness to become a researcher. I had the privilege to be supervised by Dr. Guiomar Ciapuscio, who motivated me, always, to engage in academic endeavours for my professional development. When I completed the Master Program in 2012 (after six years, with an interruption of a nine-month Fulbright scholarship to work in the United States), I could focus on my doctorate studies, which I finally finished in 2017. Synthesising this academic period of my life into words may seem a simple process, but the circumstances were far from simple because not all went smoothly. If my Master studies were complicated in the Department of Languages, the Doctorate stage was even harder. I was the first (and until now the last) CONICET intern in the history of the Department. Based on my experience as a Master candidate, I decided to apply for a scholarship in CONICET so that I could get a monthly stipend. This money allowed me to quit my jobs in the high-school and in the private institution where I worked, thus being able to focus on my work at university. By this time, I did have a clear idea of what I wanted to do professionally and academically: I wanted to become a researcher, in addition to being a teacher.

At the beginning I thought that the CONICET scholarship would help me to fully concentrate on my doctorate studies. However, it was not that simple. The main challenge was to draw a line between my part-time job at university and my duties as a CONICET intern. Again, I did not get any institutional support (neither officially nor informally), which I still cannot understand considering that very few teachers in the Department of Languages had a PhD degree (still at present) and that graduate certificates are said to be valued for academic advancement. I remember spending hours and hours on campus trying really very hard to focus on my doctorate: collecting papers for literature review, reading, designing and building two corpora, collecting and analyzing data, having meetings with my supervisors, interviewing key informants, and, of course, starting the first drafts of my thesis chapters. The fact that I was on campus led many colleagues to assume that I was a full-time teacher in the Department of Languages. It was very difficult for me to set limits. The situation was so difficult and stressful that I went through three decisions: first asking for reduction in my work hours as a teacher (from 20 hours a week to 10 hours, reducing my salary, of course), then asking for a two-year time off work (with no salary), and finally resigning my job. As my resignation was a turning point in my academic and professional career, I will focus on this specifically in the next paragraph.

When my two-year time off finished, the Vice Dean of the School of Humanities informed me that I was not allowed to get more time for my doctorate studies, not even considering that a substitute teacher had a contract with my own salary. In my university teachers can get unlimited time off work (with no salary) to work as a politician or to do on-campus administrative activities, for example. However, teachers can only have two years off work for study purposes. Under these unfair conditions, the options were for me to return to work (my previous negative experience when doing the Master Program) or to quit my job. Therefore, I decided to resign (full of determination and conviction), probably the best decision in my entire career at university. After presenting my resignation note, I was called by the Dean of the School of Humanities. I remember coming into her office and meeting her, the Vice Dean and the Academic Secretary. The three were looking at me with full of surprise, as they did not understand how and why someone could resign a job at university. The purpose of this meeting was to explain the reasons for my resignation and to confirm that I was sure of my decision. I explained my situation, trying to be as ethically correct as possible. I said clearly that if I did not leave my job, I could never finish my doctorate studies (omitting the details of my daily life in the Department of Languages). One of these authorities said something that still resonates in my mind and that I will never be able to understand: “doing graduate studies is an act of selfishness, something for you, not for the university”. I still cannot understand the perspective from which this person claimed this, an opinion totally decontextualized from the very essence of university education in Argentina. In this meeting, I reaffirmed my decision because I was totally convinced. It has been ten years now since that moment and I can convincingly state that if I had not resigned, I would have never got my PhD degree. Despite all the obstacles and challenges, like with my Master degree, I finally finished my Doctorate studies. This was a turning-point in my career, with a profound impact on who I am (or want to be) in the academic community.

As for research, I think that my real and serious research training started when I became a member of the team led by Iliana Martínez in 2005. I learned a lot listening to and looking at her, following many (but not all) of her pieces of advice, reading a lot as well as following my own instinct and intuition. I also learned by disagreeing with her, based on my own reading and ideas. Gradually, I found out what research was about and I came to understand the very essence of scientific endeavour. Research became key in my scholarship, despite the struggles to combine teaching, research and so many other duties required by my university.

Because of space, I cannot go into further details about the ups and downs of my scholarship. I have therefore referred to the most salient moments in the trajectory of my academic life. I would like to end my narrative saying that despite the somehow unfair work conditions, the obstacles and the lack of support that I have received institutionally, I am proud to have matured as an EAP practitioner and to have become a member of the local EAP disciplinary community. My graduate studies, especially the doctorate program, and my research have been really illuminating for me to genuinely discover my academic interests and, therefore, the territories I wish to navigate. Both my doctorate studies and research allowed me to read and discover theories as well as scholars, to establish academic bonds with mentors and peers, and to reaffirm my willingness to participate in the academic community as an EAP practitioner. Considering all this, then, and returning to the question in the title of this paper, I believe that embracing scholarship is always personally rewarding, though not always institutionally rewarding given that the cultural rules established by universities may not be totally clear and fair.

FINAL THOUGHTS AND CLOSING REMARKS

Following an autoethnographic approach and a reflexive perspective, this writing has aimed to unravel some of the national, institutional and disciplinary contextual conditions that have shaped our scholarship. We firmly believe that our position as EAP Practitioners can in no way be understood in isolation from the broader social events that have conditioned our discipline in particular and the universities where we work in general. Thus, we have tried to depict our experiences by briefly describing the local context and the social structure that condition us. We hope that the descriptive narratives of our experiences can trigger further academic debate about the challenges and obstacles faced by EAP Practitioners globally in their struggle to engage in scholarship as a way of building not only an individual academic identity but also a collective disciplinary identity and ethos of the international EAP community.

Budgetary restrictions, the faulty organisation of EAP chairs, failures in the functioning of contests, lack of transparency in appointments, lack of social, cultural and symbolic capital, among others, create invisible barriers to the development of scholarship. Therefore, if the mechanisms of power that enable or restrict the access, permanence and promotion of EAP practitioners in the academic profession are not explored and disentangled, any strategy to promote scholarship will be insufficient and questionable.

This autoethnographic account of our professional field in the Argentinean context leads to complex questions which, we believe, are difficult, if not impossible, to answer on the basis of sound theoretical arguments. Nevertheless, in sharing these enquiries, we hope to offer some insights into the experiences of EAP practitioners navigating complex contexts throughout the world, where the same or similar issues can be identified: If teachers' scholarship is the foundation of scientific and technological development as well as academic and educational excellence, why are the reward systems used by Argentinian universities based on teachers' age and work years rather than productivity and academic merit? Why are we trapped in a system of fierce competition, unreal work deadlines, intensive multi-tasking roles, and a chaotic range of in-campus and out-of-campus activities if public universities do not reward teachers, both academically and economically, for their work? If research and innovation are fundamental axes in the modern university's mission, why are teachers' research qualifications under-rated in the different evaluation systems used by universities? If research and professional development are based mostly on teachers' scholarship, why do Argentinian universities fail to facilitate teachers' academic work through serious and clear institutional policies? Why are merit-based achievements usually outweighed by personal contacts and membership of social-academic networks?

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From Pitch to Publication: Reflections on a Collaborative Scholarship Journey

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ABSTRACT

May 2023 saw the publication of a book I co-authored with Neil Adam Tibbetts, *A guide to in-sessional English for academic purposes: Paradigms and practices* (Tibbetts and Chapman, 2023). This was the culmination of a scholarship project that started in 2020. The article presents my narrative reflections on the whole process. Following a chronology from pitch to eventual publication, it considers the challenges and affordance of writing collaboratively, focusing on the key moments that led towards finding our authorial voices. A particular theme is how scholarship is manifested in an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) context, often without dedicated research time, with the attendant challenges of managing workloads and diverse non-scholarship activities. It considers the relationship between research and writing and gaining confidence as a writer-practitioner. Discussion is given to the role of the publisher and editor, in particular to the absence of a blind peer-review process, compared with publication of journal articles. Finding the time to write is a further strand and, in this case, the unexpected size of the project and wealth of data led to renegotiating the deadline for submitting the manuscript.

KEYWORDS: scholarship, publishing, collaboration, co-writing, in-sessional EAP

INTRODUCTION

I am an EAP lecturer employed on a 'teaching and scholarship' contract, meaning that I am not specifically allocated time for research. Like many EAP practitioners my work focuses on teaching, learning and assessment, with rather more hazy and ill-defined notions of what constitutes scholarship. I am not contractually obliged to produce scholarly outputs, for example. The meaning of scholarship is rarely articulated in my institution, but for practical purposes I would align it closely with Ding and Bruce's definition as 'activities relating to developing and refining one's overall knowledge of practice in EAP' (2017, p.111). As part of my scholarly activities in recent years I have co-authored a book, *A guide to in-sessional English for academic purposes: Paradigms and practices*

(Tibbetts and Chapman, 2023), which was published by Routledge. This article offers a personal account of this scholarship journey, of the key events from October 2020, when the initial pitch was made, through the research and writing process, to eventual publication in May 2023. My purpose here is less concerned with issues relating to teaching and learning in the in-sessional context, as examined in the book, but rather with the gestation and development of our approaches and ideas, working collaboratively as co-writers in dialogue with our editor. It is hoped that this narrative reflection may be instructive to practitioners who work within similar EAP contexts, particularly if they are considering – or in the midst of – such a scholarship project, collaborative or otherwise.

Before considering the sequence of events in more detail, it is helpful to explain a little about the book itself. The term in-sessional is a commonly used shorthand within UK higher education institutions to describe courses which support students' academic language and literacy development concurrent with their main studies. Even where nomenclature differs, in-sessionals are an EAP mainstay: they are often (but not exclusively) delivered as weekly sessions during a programme of degree-level study; attendance is often (but not exclusively) voluntary and self-selecting; syllabus content is often embedded but may be general in orientation; and they have traditionally been directed towards learners for whom English is an additional language, although this is rapidly changing. This brief description presents a picture of extreme diversity, with practices often highly localised according to institutional imperatives. Nevertheless, it is one of the key areas of activity in EAP: what de Chazal (2014, p.33) characterises as one of EAP's 'two broad types' along with pre-sessionals. We believe our book to be the first to focus specifically on practices in this learning context.

In order to highlight aspects of our writing experience that may be of interest to the reader, this article will focus on a number of interrelated matters. Key to this is the development of our roles as co-authors, supported by a sympathetic editor: how the interplay between parties influenced the form and content of the final product. The article is organised chronologically, from pitch to publication, but within this it will consider challenges and affordances of writing collaboratively, particularly within different institutional contexts, constrained by different structures, and where the academic year differs in its rhythm and pressure points. It will reflect upon how the labour of writing has to be balanced against the kinds of workloads typical of EAP, where scholarship allocation may not be optimum or evenly distributed. It will look at how we made decisions regarding textual style and writer positioning (including our shifting notion of what a 'guide' book should be). The last main strand will concern our identities as teachers of academic writing, literacy 'experts' within our respective institutions, grappling with the novel demands of writing a book. In discussing these aspects, I will be focusing on the kinds of issues that arose and how we worked to overcome them.

PITCHING, PROPOSING AND SIGNING

Neil Tibbetts, my co-author, made a brief initial pitch to Routledge at the end of a feedback questionnaire he had completed reviewing another writer's book proposal. In answer to the final question, 'Do you have any interest in reviewing or writing for Routledge?' he wrote:

> I would be very interested in writing something about in-sessional English for Academic Purposes contexts, i.e. academic writing/literacy development in the context of embedded in-sessional courses within universities and interdisciplinarity.

He had taken on the position of coordinating large-scale postgraduate in-sessional provision at a large university. This contrasts with, and perhaps complemented, my own role in a much smaller institution which encompassed a range of EAP activities, of which in-sessional was only part. When Routledge responded positively to Neil's suggestion, we agreed to work together to try to take the project forward. From his brief comment above, the publisher set up an online discussion, after which we were invited to complete a detailed questionnaire, which formed our book proposal.

The questionnaire for prospective authors required not only a rationale and synopsis of the proposed content of the book, but also detailed responses to numerous aspects we may not have otherwise considered. Within this, we articulated what we perceived the need for the book to be, provided a 'soundbite' blurb for the back cover, and explained how long we thought our content would remain up to date. We provided further detail on our target readers, whether it would have international appeal, its differentiation from other EAP books, whether it might feature on course reading lists, and suggested our own timescale for delivery. The completed questionnaire proved to be a substantial document, around 4500 words. I provide the details above to illustrate how searching this part of the process was and how rapidly completion of this questionnaire took us from a one-sentence suggestion (in May 2020) to a detailed, thought out proposal (October). The nature of the questioning was instrumental in encouraging a richly detailed and multi-faceted response. It forced us into a deeper and more critical awareness of our subject, in order to provide evidence for the book's potential and encourage the publisher's investment. The book may not have taken its eventual form without the rigour imposed by this.

We were also invited to submit a sample chapter along with the proposal, which we had to politely decline as we had done little in the way of concrete research by then: a chapter was clearly beyond our abilities at that stage. We were also asked to put forward two reviewers for the proposal. Unlike the rigorous, blind review process required when journal articles are submitted, these were reviewers suggested by, and known to, ourselves. This came as a surprise to me; I have blind reviewed anonymous article submissions and was acquainted with the process of writing for journals. This book publishing process was new and unfamiliar.

In our proposal, we had put forward a case that a book on in-sessional activities was timely. Late 2020 was a period when discussions about in-sessionals came up with increasing regularity, on for example the BALEAP JISCMail list. Practitioners often used forums to share news of changes in in-sessional provision within their own institutional contexts: a restructuring, a change in their remit, a greater or lesser disciplinary focus. A broad trend was that these changes shifted away from a generic skills-informed approach towards provision more fully embedded and collaborative with disciplinary experts, something hoped for by Wingate (2015) in her book, *Academic literacy and student diversity: The case for inclusive practice*. This spotlight on collaboration was by no means momentary: the tendency towards a more integrated approach to provision, and the issues this raises, has more recently been highlighted in, for example, Godfrey and Whong's anthology *What is good academic writing? Insights into discipline-specific student writing* (2022). In our proposal we articulated what we saw as an opportunity to shed light on the varieties of in-sessional activity extant, offering guidance to practitioners working in this field about research-informed good practices. Given such a fluid context, we initially pitched our project as a 'handbook' for practitioners navigating in-sessional contexts.

What seemed like a stumbling block was that our articulation of the purpose of the book was not fully accepted by our reviewers. One of them questioned not only the veracity of our claim that the in-sessional context was unique and important enough to devote a book to, but also whether there was even an audience for it at all. By this time, we had been assigned an editor. Unsettling as the reviewers' feedback was, it is testament to our editor's belief in the proposal that this feedback did not derail the project. Unlike the binary accept/reject outcome common to a blind-reviewed article submission, it was again apparent that the processes here were rather more flexible, informal, and relationship-informed. In our situation, authors proved to be rather more empowered than reviewers. In responding to the reviewers, our editor encouraged us to identify the aspects of our proposal that may have led them towards their particular responses. It was seen as an opportunity to finesse the articulation of our ideas, to improve the clarity of our proposal, more than its substance. Effectively, we had to respond to how a reviewer may have reached conclusions that were markedly different from our intentions: a contrast to the rather more stringent processes common to research articles. These responses drew the review process to a close: they were seen as a polite way of engaging with reviewers' input while moving on to the next stage. No further dialogue with external experts, beyond authors' own research interviews, was encouraged or sought. This experience is largely indicative of how our relationship with the editor progressed. Even though we were effectively feeling our own way, having never written a book before, our editor responded with excitement and enthusiasm, empowering us as the experts throughout. This is not to say that she did not critically respond to ideas (as we shall see) or did not generate their own helpful suggestions, but from the start we were accorded a high degree of trust, which is perhaps surprising given our own limited publication history. Overall, this sense of affirmation and respect helped build the confidence of relatively novice writers.

In the event, our 'finessed' proposal was given the green light very quickly. Our 'handbook' had now become 'a guide,' but aside from this there were few suggestions from the editorial board as to how the book might proceed. Our proposal by implication was deemed sufficient for a contract to be signed. This took place in January 2021, with a deadline for submission of the completed manuscript by May 2022. Following the signing of the contract, communication with our editor was largely casual and ad hoc in nature. This may be a reflection of her faith in us, based on a well-received proposal, but the essential fact was that that the manuscript was wholly our responsibility, which felt somewhat perturbing as at this stage we had not written anything definitive. From here on, the editor took a hands-off role, able to advise on audience and common approaches to organising such a book, but with less to add concerning content. EAP was just a small part of her editorial remit, and so we were accorded a lot of freedom: this was our field of expertise. When we asked whether we should submit any interim work for feedback or discussion, we were essentially told that it was now contractually our responsibility to simply deliver a completed manuscript by the deadline. This was not as unhelpful as it might sound, and indeed our editor did offer advice at key junctures that was invaluable in taking our manuscript forward. However, it took some trial and error for us to find our most effective way of collaborating.

COLLABORATIVE WORKING PRACTICES

Having signed the book contract, both Neil and I were very much in the midst of the academic years, with all of the attendant pressures typical to EAP. We were already locked into our respective teaching, coordination, and developmental duties with little opportunity to create substantial scholarship space until the summer. Neither of our contracts offered research time and, as noted above, scholarship itself is ill-defined at my own institution. Ding and Bruce (2017, p.112) note that, '[scholarship] activities involve a considerable personal investment and time commitment,' and we were under no illusions that this project would take us well beyond our contractual working hours. We had to be personally invested from the start.

We began research on a number of fronts: acquiring and reading relevant books and articles, reflecting and noting our own experiences, and most interestingly initiating dialogues with practitioners working in a range of in-sessional contexts. These began as fairly casual discussions with individuals within our professional networks, recorded so that both authors could access the discussions. We were soon generating a lot of data, both primary and secondary, which quickly necessitated a more controlled, systematic approach. The casual conversations within our networks quickly became semi-structured interviews conducted with practitioners and researchers working in a diverse range of contexts in the UK and beyond. We developed an approach to interviewing based on an agreed bank of questions, which form an appendix to the book (see Tibbetts and Chapman (2023, pp.224-225) for the list). We set up a secure, password-protected shared repository for material that only we had access to.

We shared responsibility for conducting interviews, which typically lasted between 45 minutes to an hour, with the non-participatory co-author taking responsibility for transcription. As we were generating reams of transcribed interviews, it became apparent that we had more data than we could easily manage in the time we could dedicate to the project. Interviews could not easily be transcribed, coded, and compared in the time available to us. In order to make sense of the wealth of data, we coded manually by performing key word searches on themes emerging in the transcripts, but also made use of NVivo, software designed for the analysis of large amounts of unstructured data. By necessity, we scheduled regular online meetings as a means to track our progress and keep the project live, to make links between interviewees' comments, share insights from our reading and identify connections, all the while reflecting on our own experiences. It became obvious that substantial reading, planning and research needed to take place before work on the manuscript could begin. But as this period stretched over several months and the deadline inched inexorably closer, I began to get concerned that the project could be greater than the time we could realistically dedicate to it.

FEARS AND DOUBTS

Aside from managing a wealth of information in the time available, I also developed a fear about our book not being able to say anything particularly novel, that we were in danger of simply reviewing published literature that is already widely known. This was heightened by some interviewees' comments suggesting that so much that seemed particular to in-sessional practice was rather simply how EAP used to be before external factors necessitated the field becoming more entrepreneurial in outlook, with an attendant focus on international student recruitment, institutional gatekeeping, and proficiency testing. Were we in danger of simply rehashing old ground?

We scheduled a meeting with our editor, and it is here that her input really helped us to find our direction and take control of the project. In answer to our concerns, she shared the valuable insight that our readership is likely to be non-researchers, whose practice was teaching and learning-focused. As our book was to be pitched as a guide, our readers may not have had the time or inclination to read the scholarly articles and books that were forming our literature base for themselves. It has often been argued that research and teaching practices in EAP occupy different domains. Citing both Hyland (2016) and Jenkins (2016), Molinari (2022, pp.40) identifies 'a mismatch between what EAP might be preaching in its scholarly publications and what it is actually teaching in its classrooms.' As we were on non-research contracts, our editor's comments were valuable in giving us confidence in an authorial voice of practitioners writing for practitioners.

A further doubt was that given in-sessional courses' extremely situated and context-dependent nature, were we able to actually say much with any definitiveness? Our ongoing interviews with practitioners were presenting a picture of great variation, as in-sessional courses responded to localised concerns. These may be the degree of disciplinarity in provision, its embeddedness with 'parent' degrees, or structural imperatives, including how each institution conceptualises its in-sessional practices, the positioning of its EAP centre and how empowered it is. Rather than attempt to overgeneralise about highly contextualised practices or overly equivocating in our recommendations, the editor's guidance again enabled a breakthrough: to bring what she called the 'voices from the field' (i.e. insights from the ongoing interviews we had been conducting) into the text itself. Integrating carefully selected quotes from interviews into the text enabled us to be more representative of the great diversity of practices and to exemplify key aspects from the literature. This also helped us to demonstrate the complexities inherent to in-sessionals, highlighting the work as a serious Academic Literacies-informed endeavour as more valuable than a deficit-informed generalist pedagogy (what Wingate (2015) disparagingly terms an instrumental 'skills approach').

Thus, even though the editor had limited expertise in the subject of the book, some of her interventions played a significant role in the ultimate form the book took. As our ideas took shape, a key thesis emerged that beyond the institution, and sometimes even within it, in-sessionals are often hidden from view: they mostly fall outside Quality Assurance oversight, they are rarely credit-bearing or assessed, and course outcomes and content are unlikely to be publicly articulated. By incorporating authentic voices, we were able to bring such occluded practices to light. Depending on one's working context, it is not unusual for in-sessional practitioners to be teaching in relative isolation, with limited opportunities for sharing, feedback or guidance among peers. In fact, some initial feedback on the published book indicates that some readers found reassurance in the prominence given to practitioners' voices, that these could offer means for navigating and possibly renegotiating less than ideal aspects of readers' own working contexts. This approach seems to have afforded some agency for change and improvement.

A KIND OF WAKEFUL INACTIVITY

Even having found our approach, literature research and practitioner interviews continued to take precedence over writing. Ultimately, we interviewed fifty practitioners and academics in the UK and many other countries. Even though practitioners were often dealing with similar issues, we found it difficult to curtail the interviews as we never achieved anything like saturation (a concept originally introduced to qualitative research by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to identify the point at which no new insights emerge from the data). The process sometimes seemed circuitous, yet each interviewee added something unique and insightful from their own contexts: nuggets of insight that generated further avenues for research which might be relevant to our readership. Nevertheless, as the pressure of the deadline approached, we became increasingly aware of not having started actually writing the manuscript. One year on from signing the contract, it sometimes seemed like we had little to show for the considerable work we had put in. But what felt like inactivity engendered a form of wakefulness: the slowly gestating book occupied a persistent background voice in our minds, a necessary but stressful constant bearing down upon us awaiting eventual expression on the page. What sometimes felt like inactivity was rather a period of processing and sorting, of testing out ideas, and ultimately finding our way forward.

As co-writers, we met online for regular discussion, but mostly with little actual product to show for all the work put in. But this did serve to keep the various strands of the book live. Our discussions were iterative in nature: we were able to chip away at and refine our ideas, and to eventually reach consensus, albeit sometimes indirectly. A key decision we made was to apportion responsibility for

the writing of different chapters, to enable independent work. To help facilitate this, regular conversation helped to arrive at a consistent writing style. We shared interpretations of literature and findings to help ensure we did not contradict ourselves within different parts of the book, even where what we were reading, our beliefs and working experience markedly differed.
During this period, we undertook giving a number of conference papers, sometimes shared, sometimes individually. These included internal learning development conferences within our own institutions and others, such as those organised by BAAL and the Norwegian Forum for English for Academic Purposes Conference (NFEAP). It was immensely helpful to articulate particular aspects of the book and to be in the position of getting feedback on our developing ideas from a wider circle than just the two of us. This was not restricted to conference Q&As, but also provided valuable opportunities for informal critical conversations about the project with colleagues at other institutions. These casual and unrecorded conversations focusing on the book's approach were a useful counterpoint to our recorded interviews concerning in-sessional EAP. In the absence of a rigorous peer-review process, conferences provided early opportunities for the airing of our ideas. Through these interactions, it was inevitable that the focus would subtly change from our original proposal. If there is something to be learned from our naïveté entering into such a large project, it is not to remain completely wedded to one's original vision. Ideas and positioning take time to unfold and develop and it is important to follow new avenues to see where they lead. We had moved away from the hands-on, practical handbook of our early proposal towards a more discursive, reflective approach: a guide that interrogates the unresolved messiness inherent to in-sessionals, rather than trying to offer tidy answers.

Overall, working within the constraints of the rhythms of our own academic years, finding the time to read, conduct interviews, transcribe these, code data and meet for regular discussion was challenging. Without allocated research time, EAP scholarship for us involved developing the self-discipline of making use of the available time when it presents itself – often between teaching, coordination and related activities. We had to overcome what Ding and Bruce (2017, p.6) term 'the EAP practitioner conundrum,' in which teaching and coordination duties limit the time and space available for research and writing. A real breakthrough only came quite close to our deadline when we met to take stock of what we had achieved thus far. Rather than meeting online, a non-virtual 'writing retreat' involved us sharing our work on A2 sheets of paper strewn on the floor, one for each chapter. We presented our work and added to each other's. This embodied and layered approach enabled us to visualise the book in a way that we had not been able to thus far. Suddenly, we were able to make connections across the bigger picture, connections we had missed in earlier discussions. It also helped flag where we were in danger of repetition across chapters, straying into the orbit of each other's chapters, and to improve the quality of each other's work. Discussing the project in physical space also offered a greater sense of control and enhanced our confidence in what we had achieved thus far. We were able to take stock of work done, but also to see with far greater clarity that our original deadline (just three months away) was now much too close.

STARTING WRITING

Renegotiating the deadline for delivery of our manuscript had its challenges. We were made aware that large publishers work to strict schedules, in which timeframes for the subediting, proofreading, indexing, design and promotion were already in lockstep with each other. However, the editor's support for the project and her understanding of our own working contexts enabled some flexibility. We negotiated a much needed four-month extension beyond our original deadline. Knowing that trying to negotiate a further extension would likely test the publisher's patience, writing now had to begin in earnest.

EAP lecturers are commonly designated as writing experts with their institutions, guiding students towards the best expression of their academic voices. And indeed, our self-perceptions as competent, or even good, academic writers aligned with this. However, attempts at starting writing led to a minor crisis of confidence. One of our interviewees made the comparison between learning academic writing in an in-sessional context and trying to learn to drive without being in a car (Tibbetts and Chapman, 2023, p.125), reflecting on how little students actually write on an in-sessional course. The comparison also seemed relevant to ourselves: as teachers of writing who had little experience of writing for publication. Time constraints are a theme in this scholarship account, but related to this was the challenge of gaining the right mental space and focus to give voice to our research and ideas on the page. Such anxious feelings perhaps engender a new sense of empathy with our 'novice' student writers.

Neil and I wrote the manuscript itself during the summer of 2022 for an early Autumn deadline. I felt that in order for me to make a start, I had to put myself in a place where I could not be interrupted, so I booked an Airbnb for a week by the seaside. Following an invigorating early morning swim, I was able to dedicate each day to writing without interruption from colleagues, email or any other aspects of my life and work. In contrast to Graham Greene's fabled target of 500 words a day, mine was closer to 2000. But after a week away, I had my first draft chapter. From here onwards, I became more adept at working with our wealth of information and the words flowed more easily.

Although the writing itself was a solitary pursuit for both of us, we found the collaborative process provided a space for creativity and development of our ideas in new and unexpected directions. It provided unique opportunities for learning. Even though there is a degree of expedience in creating a product within a tight timeframe, the process also highlighted what Heron et al. (2021, p.548) describe as, 'the enjoyment, learning possibilities, and joy of collaboration.' This was even evident in the editing and proofreading stages, titivating and lightly rewriting each other's work in order to iron out stylistic variation and avoid repetition or contradiction. Again, this presented opportunities to learn, enhancing our clarity in writing and deepening knowledge from each other's literature base.

FINAL THOUGHTS ON CO-WRITING

It should be noted that despite all the challenges described above, both Neil and I are fortunate to be on permanent contracts. As Canagarajah remarks, reflecting on his earlier experiences in an afterword to Julia Molinari's *What makes writing academic*, '[a]ccess to the resources required for publishing according to [academic writing] conventions was not equally available to everyone,' (2022, p.169). Even without allocated research time, our backgrounds, experience, workplace conditions, relative autonomy and access to literature afforded us a privileged position.

As co-writers, our friendship was strong enough to withstand critical interrogation of each other's work, which undoubtedly served to enhance the quality of the final product. However, it should also be pointed out that beyond the external reviewers' feedback on our proposal, the project received little in the way of external scrutiny prior to publication. It is curious that a relatively high-profile, substantial work was released for public scrutiny without being peer-reviewed in the way a journal article would be. Neil and I made efforts to be true to our literature and findings and were critical of each other's writing, but it still seemed somewhat exposing to have our work open to public scrutiny having received little direct feedback during its production. Happily, feedback from readers is only beginning to feed through several months after publication. I hope there is value in sharing our scholarship journey and I hope this article may bring about further discussion among colleagues and ongoing scholarship opportunities.

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A Communities of Practice approach to practitioner research: recognition and togetherness

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ABSTRACT

The question of how to promote research activity among language professionals is challenging and complex. As well as effecting positive change in pedagogy and the classroom, teacher participation in research into teaching and learning contributes to identity and professional development. This paper records the experience over a two-year period of six language teachers at the Centre of Academic Language and Development (CALD), University of Bristol, who volunteered to participate in a small internally-funded research community. This Research & Publications project has provided a space through which these and other participants gained research experience while producing publishable output. In two stages of interviews in 2022 and 2024, we employed Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice (CoP) as our overarching conceptual framework, resulting in descriptions of the lived reality of becoming, being, and belonging to an EAP teacher-researcher community of practice. The interviews reveal themes of recognition and togetherness, confidence- and community-building, and mutual support, as well as responses to hierarchy, and feelings of isolation, vulnerability, and self-doubt. We conclude that such projects are potentially empowering and transformative of both identity and career trajectories, as has been the case for some of our participants. We also conclude that research and scholarship projects should be mindful of existing organisational dynamics, of additional, competing CPD demands, and of pre-project research experience. In particular, to ease the journey into research, consideration should be given to more explicit forms of researcher training, buddying or peer mentoring.

KEYWORDS: communities of practice, research, mutual engagement, togetherness, recognition

INTRODUCTION

This article describes the experiences of teachers who have carried out research into learning and teaching practices at the Centre for Academic Language and Development (CALD), University of Bristol, with the dual aim of informing practices at CALD and publishing their findings externally. Through two stages of interviews (summer 2022 and January 2024) we documented the lived experience of six of those teachers as they undertook research projects. Those research projects took place within the context of a Research & Publications (R&P) project at CALD, which started in November 2021. This article reports on the experience of six (later five) of the project participants in the period from the inception of the project until January 2024. We consider the experience of these participants through a Communities of Practice (CoP) lens (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and also reflect on how a Communities of Practice approach contributes to the debate in EAP circles around the position of EAP professionals (or *practitioners*) in relation to research (Davis, 2019).

The majority of the participants in the R&P project have by now published in the CALD in-house blog,[1] while several participants have also published articles in EAP journals; for examples, see Boswell, 2023; Catavello, 2023; Faulkner and Hartley, 2023; Johnson, 2023; and Johnson, 2024. According to our participants, these achievements can be attributed either directly or indirectly to the R&P project, with participants benefitting from various forms of collaborative support, including co-writing in the case of Faulkner and Hartley (2023), help with the technical or intellectual side of the analysis, and peer proof-reading of drafts. It is important to note that such support has not only been provided by those at the core of the project, but also by more experienced colleagues on the periphery of the R&P community at CALD.[2]

During the project, participants met online and face-to-face, approximately once every month, with smaller groups also meeting informally throughout the period (November 2021 to January 2024). Practical training was provided by experienced group members, for example on the use of NVivo, and further input was provided on the expectations of journal editors and reviewers by an experienced editor of a renowned international educational journal. The R&P project aimed to foster a spirit of community amongst the participating teachers, whose increasing knowledge and understanding of their professional practices has had a positive impact on the quality of provision at CALD, both in the formal sense of adjustments made to details in the curriculum, and in the less formal sense of stimulating discussion in the staffroom. For these reasons, some of the research emanating from the R&P project has also been described as *critical participatory action research* (Kemmis, MacTaggart and Nixon, 2014) by Haines, Hartley, Faulkner and Gillway (2024), who explain that such projects 'provide teachers with opportunities to collaborate in re-thinking educational processes, and that this can act as a catalyst to their professional development' (2023, p.156).

[1] The CALD Teaching & Learning network in-house blog: https://teachingandlearningnetwork.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/
[2] In this respect, we are grateful in particular to our colleague Debra Jones and to Dr Luis Carabantes, now of Queen Mary, University of London.

This article presents qualitative evidence regarding the experience of the R&P participants, delving into the emergence of the R&P project as a Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998). The article can be seen as a contribution to existing literature on the development of teacher researchers, confirming that the Communities of Practice framework is a valuable way of framing such research endeavours (Hill & Haigh, 2012; Ng & Pemberton, 2013; Warr Pedersen, 2016; Wilson, Wilson & Witthaus, 2020; Khoo, 2023). In respect of the debate in the EAP community around the value of teacher research, we have chosen to report the experiences of our participants through their voices, and we have therefore endeavoured to avoid attributing labels such as *practitioner* or *scholarship* to them or to their activities. While mindful of the perceived differences between scholarship and research (Ding & Bruce, 2017, p.111), and also mindful of the longstanding divide between researchers and practitioners, in this article we use the term *research* to mean both - and we support calls and efforts to inform professional learning and development through research practices and processes (Cordingley, 2015; Davis, 2019; Bruce, 2021). Meanwhile, there remains a need for greater conceptual understanding of teacher development projects in terms of overarching frameworks, which explains why the notion of Communities of Practice (hereafter CoP) was adopted for this research.

We position our participants as individuals with complex professional identities (Ivanic, 2002; Bamber, 2014), for instance, at times teacher, at times researcher, at times both, among other identities. As well as evaluating our participants' activity through the CoP lens, as described above, this article therefore provides insights into the benefits of practitioner research for the professional development of individual teachers and their identity, and the impact this has on the wider teaching-researching community in which they work. We take such identities to be 'fluid, constantly (re)negotiated and reconstructed over time within their changing contexts' (Bamber, 2014, pp.158–159). As the environment in which they work changes, and as teachers engage in new or revised activity in that environment, this may lead them to different beliefs in terms of what they can do, what is expected of them, what they expect of themselves, and what constitutes their professional development. This *identity* work involves them affiliating with others as Ivanic explains: 'Identity is discoursally constructed when people participate in the practices which constitute a discourse, and thereby affiliate themselves with others who engage in the same practices' (Ivanic, 2002, p.16).

This article has its roots in conversations between the authors about the relevance of the concepts they have previously used in their research to the experiences of individuals in the R&P project. This relevance is rooted in previous work (e.g. Haines and Tarusarira, 2021; Pocock, 2021) which both researchers have conducted employing the notion of CoP. Haines and Tarusarira (2021) explored an insider/outside metaphor in the context of higher education and professional identity formation, while Pocock (2021) employed notions of CoP alongside MacIntyre's concept of *Practice* to explore the notion of *experience* as it features in educational contexts relevant to training and evaluation. Our initial conversations therefore focused on CoP (Wenger, 1998) and the concepts of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and Mutual Engagement (Wenger, 1998). We considered the relevance of CoP to the development of the R&P project, seeing this as an emergent community of practitioner researchers, taking a critical stance in relation to the use of the term 'Community' to describe the relationships we were observing, as reflected in Wenger's own discussion of the term:

> Because the term 'community' is usually a very positive one, I cannot emphasize enough that these interrelations arise out of engagement in practice and not out of an idealized view of what a community should be like. In particular, connotations of peaceful co-existence, mutual support, or interpersonal allegiance are not assumed, though of course they may exist in specific cases (Wenger, 1998, pp.76-77, emphasis in the original).

In this spirit, we did not want to make assumptions about the extent to which our colleagues experienced the R&P project as a community, so we avoided explicit focus on 'community' in the first round of data collection in the summer of 2022, deciding instead to focus on Lave and Wenger's (1991) earlier metaphor of growth through apprenticeship to situated learning (see Methods section below). This involved using Lave and Wenger's concept of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) (Lave and Wenger 1991) through its different stages, asking teachers to identify as *newcomers* or *novices*, *journeyfolk*, or *old-timers* in relation to their research experience.

Our recognition of the complexity of roles and relationships in the CALD setting also led us to take a critical stance towards our own positionality as researchers. While we considered ourselves equal partners throughout the research project, we needed to recognise differences in relation to participants given our roles in the organisation. Author 1 is a senior teacher of English for Academic Purposes who has been teaching at CALD for many years, and as such he is a direct teaching colleague of the participants. He is also a union representative and branch officer. Author 2 is a member of the Senior Management Team at the Centre, and has worked at CALD for fewer years, meaning that his relationship with the participants has a different character to that of Author 1. This difference in position has been brought home to us during the project as three participants agreed to share their data openly with both researchers, whereas three participants preferred to remain anonymous for Author 1. Our response to this dilemma is outlined in the Methods section.

This article shares the experiences of these CALD teachers/researchers in the hope that these stories will inspire others in similar settings both in the UK and abroad in their research endeavours. We are also investigating how projects of this type may function as an 'iterative process of critical reflection, reaching out in formal and informal ways to colleagues and students' (Haines et al., 2024, p.148), and whether this may result in 'a suspension of some of the constraints on discussion that ordinarily occur in hierarchical organisations' (Kemmis et al., 2014, p.48).

METHODS

Of the 14 members of staff who originally volunteered for the R&P project, ten participated actively to varying degrees in the project, including Author 1, and six of these agreed to participate in this study. The study employed a reflexive serial interviewing technique allowing for participants to co-create understanding and for the cross-checking and validation of themes and conclusions reached (Roulston, 2010; Read, 2018; Pessoa et al., 2019). Six R&P participants were interviewed at the first stage (summer, 2022). One interviewee left the institution in between first and second interviews, with the result that five interviews were carried out at the second stage (January 2024). Institutional and commonly established ethical protocols have been adhered to in the conducting of this research. An outline of the study and list of procedures and/or research activities, including participant recruitment and informed consent was provided prior to the start. Strict protocols were adhered to regarding anonymity and confidentiality. All participants were asked if they would prefer to remain completely anonymous, which three requested. All quotations below are entirely anonymised.

Semi-structured interview questions were prepared prior to interview. Questions (see appendix) were piloted and revised between the authors. Interviews took around 45 minutes, six taking place in the summer of 2022, and then five in January 2024. Interviews were conducted on Teams so as to allow for recording and transcription as well as to increase opportunities for participation online. Qualitative data analysis was conducted, broadly following the reflective thematic analysis associated with Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019; 2021). While not strictly employing the six-phases of the Braun and Clarke analytical process, (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87), the overall process of analysis was as Braun and Clarke advocate, i.e. flexible and recursive, emphasising creativity and interpretation, collaboration and autonomy. Ultimately, our current themes are our own, open to further question and interpretation.

A number of themes emerged from analysis of the data from the first round of interviews. In the second round of interviews, we addressed these themes more specifically, referring participants back to the transcripts from the first interviews, and asking them how the themes resonated with them a year-and-a-half after the initial interviews. We were interested in which themes they would still find significant or insignificant at this later stage and whether there were themes that fell outside of their later experience. We also asked whether there were any themes missing from their reading of the first interview transcripts.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Through the two sets of interviews in the summer of 2022 and January 2024, we were able to make sense of the experiences of five R&P project participants in relation to several emerging themes. These were: multi-membership; self-doubt and vulnerability; togetherness and recognition; practical support; and hierarchy. In this section, we first discuss the theme of multi-membership, as we see this as a *given*, a state of being, which is entirely consistent with our CoP lens (hence our references to Wenger, 1998, in the section below). Next, we focus on issues around 'self-doubt and vulnerability', as by January 2024 this theme was less evident than the others, which reflects the idea that at this later stage of the project most interviewees considered themselves *journeyfolk* rather than *novices*. We continue our analysis by discussing the inter-related themes of 'togetherness' and 'recognition', before moving on to 'practical concerns', themes that have been recurrent throughout the data. Finally, we move on to the theme of 'hierarchy', which runs through these other themes. We would like the reader to see our thematic compilation of the experiences of these participants as a narrative which depicts the development of the project into a community of practice. The strength of a narrative methodology, as described by McIntosh and Nutt (2022, p.10) is that 'these individual accounts are more than the sum of their parts - they provide layers of knowledge and pertinent insights into particular situations, moments, and roles'. In the sections below, we make use of participants' own words, allowing them to voice their insights.

Multi-membership

A theme that was prominent from the start of our data collection was that of overlapping communities of practice, or *multi-membership* (Wenger, 1998, pp.160). This multi-membership can also be described as a 'landscape of practice' (Wilson, Wilson, & Witthaus, 2020, p.40, citing

Wenger-Trayner et al.). This concept of a professional individual being simultaneously part of several overlapping communities, and of them being active to a lesser or greater extent in any of these given communities at any one time, lies at the core of our understanding of the teacher as researcher. The premise of this article is that a person can be both a teacher and a researcher, and that the overlap between the teaching and the research community may be greater or less, but that does not make the membership of either of those communities any less valid. In the case of an EAP teacher who is writing a Masters dissertation or a PhD on a precise aspect of Applied Linguistics, the overlap in knowledge between the two communities may be limited, but the transfer of skills across those two communities can still be deeply meaningful, for instance when someone feels more confident teaching students to write academically because they have experience of writing academically themselves. In the case of the R&P project, the overlap between the teaching community and the research community will be large, because teachers are carrying out small research projects that investigate local practices. Nevertheless, the distinction between the communities is important because it validates the teacher in taking on a researcher persona or identity in one aspect of activity, while maintaining their teacher identity in another area of activity, even though both activities are closely aligned in practice. Sometimes we simplify this by explaining that at certain moments we are 'wearing different hats'.

> For professional occupations, however, the social body of knowledge is not a single community of practice … the 'body of knowledge' of a profession is best understood as a 'landscape of practice' consisting of a complex system of communities of practice and the boundaries between them.
> Wenger- Trayner, Fenton-O'Creevy, Hutchinson, Kubiak, & Wenger-Trayner, 2014, p. 2.

It is also important to recognise that the interplay between activity in these overlapping communities is not necessarily harmonious but can be tense and conflictual: 'Most situations that involve sustained interpersonal engagement generate their fair share of tensions and conflicts' (Wenger, 1998, p.77). One participant spoke of their decades-long membership of the teaching community being in tension with their newer researcher identity: 'To be honest, I've been experimenting and doing my own action research for the last 20 years to see what worked best as a teacher'. For this participant, the explicit demands and expectations of becoming a researcher in this *publication and official research* sense proved a source of inter-community frustration: 'I'm definitely new to that. I don't know how to do things like, you know, ethics requests … I've never done a course in qualitative or quantitative research, so I don't know if I'm doing it right'.

We understand that as our R&P participants are members of several overlapping communities, their sense of togetherness may also occur through collaboration in other communities (e.g. with materials developers at CALD, other HEA fellowship candidates, etc.), and we realise that a challenge for the R&P community of practice is to harness the knowledge and confidence that *journeyfolk* may experience through *togetherness elsewhere* to the benefit of newer members of the R&P community.

Self-doubt and vulnerability

In the summer of 2022, half a year into the R&P project, some participants reported a sense of vulnerability. They were taking a risk in stepping into an arena in which they had little previous experience, and this was expressed in comments such as ‘I don’t feel like we are coming up with anything new or ground-breaking’ and ‘maybe I should have stayed within my comfort zone’. For these participants there was a step into the unknown as they were confronted with a transition in their identities from a teaching persona in which they were experienced *old-hands*, or *masters* in the terminology of Lave and Wenger (1991), to a researcher persona which was unfamiliar and left them feeling like a *newcomer*.

In terms of identity, they were trying on a new mantle, but gradually they were also becoming more comfortable due to the spirit of sharing and an emerging sense of community: ‘I feel like an insider even though I have a million questions’. Despite the doubts and vulnerability, positivity emerged from interviewees, reporting a research process that was becoming ‘enjoyable’ and ‘empowering’, and which provided them with ‘confidence’. These realizations were also born out of the novelty of the experience, which interviewees describing their activity as ‘all quite new to me’ and admitting ‘I feel a novice’. Yet one participant reported that they felt ‘more comfortable now with being a novice and an outsider, so I’m prepared to ask questions’.

By January 2024, the themes of ‘self-doubt and vulnerability’ were much less evident, and this was confirmed in the data as participants had gained confidence in what was no longer a new arena but a recognizable community of practice. Participants reported development, both individually and as a community of practice: ‘I see it as more collaborative now because I've done a few little projects with other people. That's a new part of my experience of research, doing it more collaboratively’ and ‘I think having been through the R&P process, I see more opportunities for research than I used to. I see more potential for research’.

Recognition and Togetherness

During the initial interviews, participants highlighted the value of ‘recognition’, for instance when referring to peer recognition of colleagues’ background and experience in research. One interviewee described how she was asked by more senior colleagues to speak at a 'deep dive' event, which gave her confidence, making her feel that what they were doing was useful: 'And I thought, ooh, so I've been recognized, you know, my research, although it's small scale and I don't have a huge amount of experience in it. It's recognized as being valuable to what we're doing here in the Centre.' This example also relates to self-recognition in the sense of not initially seeing oneself as a researcher, but through the course of the R&P project beginning to identify experiences that demonstrate 'researcher-ness' and provide one with researcher legitimacy. One participant spoke of meeting with two more experienced participants, sharing how their projects were developing, exchanging resources, and seeing how analysis was being conducted. This participant was also struck by the 'enthusiasm' of another participant, finding this 'inspiring', and concluded that, 'I should be a bit more like that.' This participant also felt validated by the R&P Co-ordinator in meetings 'because he … sees us all as very, like, valid researchers'. Another spoke of the enthusiasm and encouragement offered by R&P colleagues. They had been made to believe that they could do it: 'I can be a researcher!'.

We understand recognition to be a social concept that is very closely related to togetherness, which is made visible through different modes of collaboration and an emerging sense of community. Research is so often experienced as a solitary process, which can result in feelings of isolation, as described above. Our participants emphasise a growing sense of togetherness in interviews, talking about 'everyone' and 'someone else' and 'each other'. There was recognition of what others could 'offer' them and what they could 'offer' others. Further to the sense of over-lapping communities described above, there was therefore a sense of a 'community forming' rather than a 'community already formed'. During the project, the authors witnessed the development of a reciprocal and collaborative processes that led to the production of blog posts and publications. Typical reflections included: 'We can learn from each other'; 'I'm comparing my progress'; 'I can pass on that knowledge', demonstrating a growing recognition that participants could find practical support within the community. Community-building and participation were evident through the opportunities afforded to share: 'I am able to talk about what I have learned from those experiences; then maybe you feel a bit more part of the community'. This fits, for instance, with Warr Pedersen's (2016, p.685) description of the value of a CoP model as 'recognition that collaborative learning can enable opportunities for both individuals and groups to share and learn from one another's practice'.

The levels and types of recognition associated with R&P work varied from person to person. One interviewee explained how the project made them feel more valued, which shows that recognition, far from being an abstract concept, is nurtured through relationships within the community: ‘I feel more valued … From my point of view, it's the fact that other people are coming to me and asking me for advice or feedback’. Interviewees also described the importance of sharing ongoing research through the CALD in-house blog because that leads others to engage with them and recognise their contribution to the knowledge of the community: ‘The blog posts have been shared, people have read them, commented on them ... So that's kind of recognition I guess’. Meanwhile, recognition may also be provided by external bodies in a more formal way. For instance, one interviewee noted: ‘I've got the HEA accreditation now and I talked about what I’d done related to R&P’.

The second stage interviews confirmed this sense of togetherness, which interviewees explained was originally instilled by the coordinator (‘They made it so inclusive’; ‘They asked me to present’). Later, this became a more organic process: ‘So I did informally mentor a couple of colleagues, encouraging them to get involved in action research, not in a formal capacity but just talking about my experiences in the staff room’. Two years into the project, interviewees expressed how far the community of practice had come, and how far they had come in taking on a researcher identity through that community:

> As long as you feel comfortable within that community of practice, to be able to be humble and to admit what you don't know. Well, then you don't feel like an outsider because you’re part of that knowledge building process, aren't you? You're all kind of trying to work together to understand the research skills in more depth.

The R&P project created a space in which researcher identities could develop through relatively informal mutual engagement and support. The project did not aim to establish more formal support mechanisms or collaborative procedures; rather, it aimed to provide a platform through which knowledge and experience can be shared. This process included asking participants to share with the community specific knowledge or experience that they have gained from courses they have taken for qualifications or from other projects. This seems to confirm that in higher education, a Community of Practice can function as ‘an alternative to traditional training or professional development programs’ (Wilson et al, 2020, p.40).

Practical concerns

A recurring theme was ‘practical support’, both the kinds already on offer and the support that could (or should) be put in place in future. More than one participant said they found R&P ‘very supportive', and interviewees reported valuing the formal training events run through the project on NVivo and academic publishing. In both cases, what resonated was being able to learn something new, something that filled a gap.

There were also a number of suggestions as to how the practical support on offer might be improved. More than one interviewee suggested having a contact person available, 'someone who had experience of the method that I'm using'. Another interviewee recommended 'having a partner teacher, or just having someone to check in with' or 'introducing mentors', but added, 'a lot of people are doing the research together anyway, so I guess they can support each other', a sign once again of emerging togetherness. Others valued collaborative support without being able to offer it themselves, one commenting: 'I feel a little bit envious of the people who are working together because I think that's more beneficial and more enjoyable'.

Some interviewees would have appreciated more formal guidance. One interviewee suggests that guidance be offered from the very start: 'I could have done with help at the beginning to realize that what I was trying to do was far too complex'. Early, constructive feedback would have helped this interviewee who 'was trying too hard to satisfy the R&P project because there was this idea that I had to write a journal article. I thought I had to include complicated theories'. The value of practical support through a formalised buddy system was also expressed: 'What I wanted on the R&P project was maybe a mentor or a buddy who I could go to at any stage in the process'. An informal buddy arrangement was started by another interviewee but later abandoned: 'We tried unofficially to sort of help each other out, but people started at different times and finished at different times'.

Time is an issue that recurred, especially when participants were studying for other qualifications alongside R&P projects or when they are employed on fractional (part-time) contracts. One interviewee explained that they had temporarily dropped out of the R&P project because of the impact it was having on their other research: 'I kind of drifted into it a little bit and ... my priority is my doctoral research and I'm a little bit on the fence about how much time I want to spend on this R&P project'. They explained that the difficulty was not the R&P opportunity per se: 'it's just a conflict of interest. If I had more time, I'd be very happy to carry on doing it, but it's the balance'.

On occasions, therefore, the project did not produce the CoP experience that we had anticipated, and it was not straightforward for participants to set priorities. Furthermore, some interviewees reported feelings of isolation despite their achievements: 'I did feel isolated and vulnerable at times and had lots of doubts about where I was going with the project. But I also felt really positive once I managed to reach certain milestones, for example writing a blog post or presenting at a conference or submitting to journals'. Another interviewee attributed such isolation to meetings being held online, something that was initially a result of Covid lockdowns, but which tended to continue due to increased working from home. If they were physically present, they reasoned they would have conversations about what other R&P participants were doing, which connects to the earlier comment about informal conversations in the staff room: 'When I'm physically there in the room with people … there's just a sense of being a part of this, but you don't get that online'.

Other concerns relate to a sense of being forced to collaborate: 'I get the impression that there is a very, very strong emphasis on collaboration. You have to be seen to be collaborating.' This interviewee also wondered whether this onus on collaboration acted as an obstacle to participation for some people, given the time limitations facing staff. A suggestion for future R&P projects was to create a space where experiences could be shared but without having to collaborate as such, suggesting that 'it could be a place for researchers to go and share experiences and learn from each other but not necessarily have to collaborate'. It seems there is a need to clarify expectations regarding collaboration in the R&P project, as there are many forms of potential collaboration and sharing in a community of practice, and the expectation of participants researching and writing together is only one such form; or rather, when considering multi-membership writing is an activity that needs to be structured alongside other activities in such a way that it is possible to succeed in activities in different communities at different times, and perhaps the envisaged mentoring should focus on the planning as much as the research process.

Hierarchy

The last theme that emerged from the initial interviews is 'hierarchy'. Firstly, there is the 'researcher hierarchy', in terms of years of experience. One interviewee spoke of another R&P participant being 'more experienced in this area, regardless of whether I knew they had a PhD, they just use knowledge that I don't have'. Hierarchy also appeared in comments about the type of research previously conducted, and whether conferences and journals were 'proper', 'prestigious', or not. Hierarchy also appeared to operate in another way. One interviewee expressed doubt, for example, over the relevance and value in teaching and learning strategies derived from more formalised, systematic research. This doubt appeared to stem from the interviewee's favoured positioning, in terms of identity, as an experience-led teacher rather than a researcher. The interviewee appeared to prioritise the findings of their own classroom experience, cultivated and sharpened over time.

Joining the R&P project appeared to pose a challenge to their professional identity and self-understanding because 'research' as the interviewee understood it (lauding theory, concepts, and methods) deprioritised insights and strategies gained purely from professional experience. The opportunity to participate in the researcher community involved the interviewee reassessing the place of teaching in relation to research. In other words, whereas prior to the R&P project, teaching had been regarded as higher in the hierarchical constellation of the multiple memberships forming their identity, participation in the project had implicitly if not explicitly called for a re-evaluation.

DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this article has been to demonstrate the value of a CoP lens in understanding the experiences of participants in a project that has empowered teachers to carry out research into teaching and learning practices at CALD. Such a discussion touches upon debate in the EAP literature concerning the role of teachers in carrying out such research, and there is a call for more research into the experience of EAP teachers; for instance, Fitzpatrick, Costley and Tavakoli (2022, pp. 1-2) note that 'so far little research has been conducted to understand how EAP teachers perceive their own expertise or how their professionalism develops over time'. In the following section, we therefore reflect upon the value of our data in relation to current thinking about the development of EAP teachers through research activity and their identities as researchers, taking a CoP perspective when doing so. We also reflect below on the impact the project has had on the professional development of these teachers.

Bruce (2021) sees a need for progressive development in three areas if EAP is to grow as a global academic field. These are the EAP knowledge base as a basis for future research and practice; EAP practitioner formation; and EAP discourse communities (Bruce, 2021, p. 24). In different ways, the R&P project contributes to all three areas, but it is particularly valuable in exemplifying how practitioner formation may take place through the collaborative formation of a community. A CoP provides the associative potential of a 'discourse community', but as a site of collaborative activity, it also contributes to 'practitioner formation' in a more holistic way than many training courses or CPD workshops - although such training and CPD will feed into the CoP whenever appropriate. We share Bruce's observation that 'it is important to conceptualize the 'formation' of the EAP practitioner in a holistic and ongoing way; it should be seen as a continuous, conscious, and reflexive process' (Bruce, 2021, p.31). In this context, the R&P project fulfils many of the collective aspects of development described by Bruce, such as providing opportunities for 'the dissemination and communication of knowledge to peers and, in the case of research, peer review' (Bruce, 2021, p.32). We would extend the value of *community* to any group, such as this R&P project, which is goal-orientated in shared and collective terms. A CoP such as the R&P project, which is in a dynamic state of flux, constantly forming and re-forming, will contribute to the progressive development of the EAP field, for instance because multi-membership results in R&P participants attending and contributing to the conferences of associations such as *BALEAP*, *BAAL* and *InForm* in order to disseminate and to bring new knowledge back into the CoP.

Through the R&P project, participants have had the opportunity to step outside of the day-to-day structures inherent to their teaching role, to carry out activity with others, including those who are not their regular colleagues, reaching into areas of knowledge that may not be their regular concern, and then feeding the product of this activity back into their more regular activity. This contributes to their own development and that of their colleagues, as well as development of the curriculum and the organisation. We recognise Davis' (2019) concern that 'the majority of EAP practitioners are not researchers or authors of journal publications, at least in the UK' (Davis, 2019, p.73), but can report that R&P participants have become or are in the process of becoming published authors, as exemplified above, and that this is contributing to their career development. A key issue, as Davis concludes, is the provision of appropriate support: 'opportunities for practitioners to develop their career through publishing can be pivotal, but according to the practitioner respondents, lack of support or even opposition from managers and institutions is a barrier to development' (Davis, 2019, p.82). The R&P project has been a site of support in several ways, as discussed above, but to an even greater extent, as we have shown, it is also a site of recognition and togetherness.

We move on now to a discussion of the impact of the CoP approach during the R&P project, both on the individual participants and on others, and we discuss the (related) onward journeys of the individual participants and of the community of practice as a whole. Our interviewees report impact on themselves, on others at CALD, including their students, and also potentially on the wider university environment. For example, in terms of impact on the self, one interviewee notes that 'the R&P gave me more confidence to apply for another role because I was able to talk about the recent action research project I did and I was able to say that I had had an article published'. Another potential impact can be found in applications for formal qualifications: 'If they're applying for a PhD or an EdD, then I guess being able to write about the R&P project on their application form or their application for funding, that's really, really beneficial'.

Impact is also reported on the student experience at CALD, as the R&P project has provided participants with a fuller understanding of the writing process ‘and the idea of writing for your audience, and then that helps me to explain that to the students because I've been through that process more times than I had before’. Another participant said ‘it definitely had an impact on my teaching in terms of the way I would approach peer review with the students. I've just got a better understanding of those challenges that they face and how I can try and make the process a bit easier for them’. Findings from R&P research projects have already resulted in improvements in materials at CALD, and in one case the R&P project is creating benefits across the institution as the participant has moved on to a project ‘with the aim of creating a set of guidelines for senior management at the university’.

Two years into the R&P project, there has been a tangible impact on its participants and on the learning and teaching environment in which they work. We are now considering the onward journeys both of the individual participants and of the community of practice as a whole. Interviewees describe momentum in their research journeys: ‘I definitely want to carry on researching after this case study is published. I'd want to carry on publishing, maybe a journal article and maybe carry on looking at similar topics that I've started ... I can see it building to more research and more publications’. Another person described the value in terms of confidence-building, noting that they are now better equipped to ask the right questions and to accept the vulnerability inherent to academic research, including the ability ‘to admit what you don't know, because you're more aware of what you don't know’. It is clear that the development of the R&P project as a separate entity to more formal routes to knowledge acquisition, be that CPD or traditional qualifications, has created another dimension for development alongside those activities. As a CoP, the R&P project has engendered a sense of togetherness as well as different forms of mutual recognition, as described by Wenger: ‘By recognizing the mutuality of our participation, we become part of each other’ (Wenger, 1998, p.56).

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the R&P project has the potential to bring people together, increasing their sense of a researcher identity, and providing them with different forms of recognition. This recognition has included publications, dialogues with colleagues about in-house blog posts, the opportunity to present at conferences, and in some cases the chance to move into other roles in the university. As with any organisation, there are issues of hierarchy; there is a history and a culture in the organisation that individuals will experience differently. The study shows that while the project created opportunities for many of the participants, and it resulted in impact at a variety of levels, it has not produced results in equal measure for all participants. Some interviewees experienced frustration with a lack of time and even isolation. Despite this, the first two years of the project produced tangible results in terms of publications as well as proving a positive developmental experience for many participants, meaning that there is a foundation from which to grow. In order for the process to continue to achieve its potential, and for all participants to continue to experience both togetherness and recognition, there is a need for greater practical support. We need to ensure that we continue to involve the more experienced *journeyfolk* in such a way that *newcomers* feel supported and recognised as valued members of the community. We also need to ensure that we can offer these *journeyfolk* further opportunities for growth through the community of practice as they continue to develop further in the other arenas in which they are active.

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APPENDIX

Stage One

Your initial interviews during the early stages of the R&P project (Summer 2022)

Initial Questions for Participants

Please briefly tell us your research experience. What is your current research project?

- What do you understand by the term research?
- In what ways if any has your previous research experience been recognised, valued, and used by the organisation (university, faculty, department, etc.)?

- Lave and Wenger describe a three-stage trajectory through a community of practice beginning with the ‘novice’, next the ‘journeyperson’, and ending with the ‘old-timer’? At what point - ‘novice’, ‘journeyperson’, or ‘old-timer’ - would you say you are on your research journey? Why?
- Are there times when you feel more like one – ‘novice’, ‘journeyman’, or ‘old-timer’ - than another? Under which circumstances?
- Are you aware of who the ‘novices’, ‘journeymen’, and ‘old-timers’ are in your current research project? What makes you categorise them in these ways?
- What have you gained/not gained from their participation in the R&P project? How have you engaged with them/how have they have engaged with you so far?
- Are there times when you feel more of an outsider as regards to the R&P project community? Under which circumstances? Are there times when you feel more of an insider? Under which circumstances?
- How could your research journey be made easier?
- Are you aware of key moments or critical incidents through which you have understood how others (the insiders or outsiders, the ‘novices’, ‘journeymen’, or ‘old-timers’) position you/are positioned in relation to and as a member of the R&P project research community? How have you responded/what has been the response in these key moments or incidents? How have you learned to respond in ways that allow you agency?

Stage two

Interview prompt, second round:

‘The data we've collected already from all participants has proved really very interesting and much of what emerged so far we'll be sharing with you now in the second set of interviews which are an opportunity for you to confirm or challenge our first interview findings and for us to ask a few more questions.’

- What do you now understand by the term research? (This is what was said last time – has this understanding now changed?)
- In what ways if any has your R&P project experience been recognised, valued, and used by the organisation (university, faculty, department, etc.)?
- Lave and Wenger describe a three-stage trajectory through a community of practice beginning with the ‘novice’, next the ‘journeyperson’, and ending with the ‘old-timer’? (This is what was said last time...) At what point - ‘novice’, ‘journeyperson’, or ‘old-timer’ - would you say you are now on your research journey? Why?

- What have you gained/not gained from participation in the R&P project? Your students? The wider teacher-researcher community?
- You were asked whether there were times when you feel more of an outsider as regards to the R&P project community. You said... Has this changed?
- Are you planning on conducting further research after the R&P project? In what ways if at all has the R&P project encouraged or informed further research interests of your own? How could your ongoing research journey be made easier?

Low expectations in a hostile environment: the challenges of conducting scholarship in a research-focused university

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ABSTRACT

In this piece, the author looks back on her ten-year journey as a language teaching scholar in the modern foreign languages department of a UK research-focused university. On the basis of the descriptions of the scholarship of teaching and learning offered in the literature, she compares these depictions with her own experience, adding first-hand observations that complement and illustrate these published accounts. Besides the well-known obstacles faced by teaching staff who wish to conduct scholarship, such as lack of available time and insufficient institutional support, she identifies low expectations on behalf of management and the lack of positive role models as some of the reasons why scholarship drifts along the margins of academic life. To remedy this state of affairs, several actions are required: the establishment of a clear definition of what constitutes scholarship; the development of a set of transparent and unambiguous criteria for the evaluation of scholarship; and the assignment of scholarship evaluation exercises to qualified professionals who would conduct blind peer-reviews, following the evaluation model of other academic dissemination networks. Lastly, the author proposes a course of action to systematically challenge the low expectations placed by universities on language teaching staff and to reclaim the role of scholarship as a key agent in the pursuit of equality, inclusivity and social justice, for staff as well as for students.

KEYWORDS: language teaching scholarship, evaluation of scholarship, assessment of scholarship, low status of scholarship, scholarship vs research

THE *SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING* AND THE ROLE OF THE SCHOLAR

The role of the *scholar*, as it has been traditionally understood, is that of an academic who contributes to the advancement of knowledge in their discipline and publishes their research findings to share them with the academic community (Boyer, 1990). The *scholar*, then, has been conventionally known as an individual who carries out *scholarship*, in a sense akin to the task that Boyer designated as *the scholarship of discovery* (1990, p.17) and that is synonymous with research. Over time, the association of scholarship with research activity and the unquestionable preeminence of research over the rest of areas of academic work led to the marginalisation of other activities that are part of the scholarly process, such as those related to teaching (Nicholls, 2005). In this context, *the scholarship of teaching*, one of the four types of scholarship identified by Boyer in the essay *Scholarship reconsidered: priorities of the professoriate* (1990, p.16), began to gain currency as the term chosen to define an area of activity that would raise the profile of teaching and associated work, enhancing it as a core professional value that would add symbolic and social capital to student-facing tasks (Nicholls, 2005, p.71).

Through this elevation of *the scholarship of teaching* as an area of work that would grant dignity and prestige to teaching-related activities, the notion has progressively drifted away from the traditional meaning of *scholarship* as the discovery of new knowledge since the publication of Boyer's essay in 1990. While the efforts to establish *the scholarship of teaching* (later known as *the scholarship of teaching and learning*) as an area of academic work in its own right were, undoubtedly, well meant, the outcome of this separation has ended up doing more harm than good, as the scholarship of teaching has come to be seen, at best, as a 'subspecies of research' (Park, 1996, p.49); at worst, as a term to designate of teaching-related activities with little or no intellectual ambition. Tainted by its close relationship with teaching, scholarship is now viewed as a low-status endeavour in academic labour (Boshier, 2009; Culver, 2023; Higher Education Academy, 2016; Macfarlane, 2011; Schroeder, 2007; Smith and Walker, 2021; Tight, 2018; Webb and Tierney, 2020).

This piece offers an account of my experience as an academic trying to develop the scholarship of teaching in the modern foreign languages department of a UK research-focused university. Taking into consideration the context described in the previous paragraphs, I will summarise the problems faced by practitioners who aim to undertake scholarship, as described in the literature, and I will compare them with the challenges I faced, adding first-hand information when possible. Lastly, I will put forward some proposals to raise the profile of scholarship in research-intensive institutions, with a view to making its impact more meaningful and valuable for staff and students.

THE CHALLENGES TO SCHOLARSHIP

Lack of definition, and how it leads to low expectations

One of the challenges to scholarship that permeates the literature around the topic is its lack of definition (Elton, 2005; Tight, 2018). Admittedly, the potential for confusion was already present in the seminal essay by Ernest L. Boyer when he claimed that all faculty members (not only research-active staff) should aim to establish researcher credentials, only to state, a few lines later, that activities like 'reading the literature' and keeping up with publications on teaching are enough to do so (1990, p.28). This approach encouraged the notion that 'doing scholarship' meant keeping up to date with the latest developments in teaching in the disciplines by reading papers and talking to colleagues, but not necessarily contributing to the advancement of knowledge (Canning and Masika, 2022; Cotton, Miller and Kneale, 2018; Glassick, Huber and Maeroff, 1997). The divergence between this perception of what *scholarship* is and the original concept, closer to what was traditionally understood as *research*, led to a proliferation of meanings of the term *scholarship* (Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin and Prosser, 2000) and, ultimately, to a state of affairs that Alan M. Rubin labelled as 'the scholarship of confusion' (2000, p.263).

The following examples illustrate the multiplicity of meanings accorded to the term *scholarship*, as well as the vagueness in its definitions. Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin and Prosser do not put forward a definition as such, but claim that the aim of scholarship is 'to make transparent how we have made learning possible'. They add: 'For this to happen, university teachers must be informed of the theoretical perspectives and literature of teaching and learning in the discipline, and be able to collect and present rigorous evidence of their effectiveness' (2000, p.156). Admitting that there is no well-defined meaning for the term scholarship, Elton characterises it as 'a deep and critical understanding of that discipline and an extensive knowledge of the wider field in which the discipline is embedded' (2005, p.109). Nicholls, who states that scholarship, in academic work, is conventionally associated with research, mentions journal papers, textbooks and undergraduate classes as examples of activities that are part of scholarly work (2005, pp.13-14). For Webb and Tierney, scholarship is 'the amalgamation of pedagogic research, and understanding of education theory and literature, reflection on one's practice as a teacher in higher education, and a learning-centred conception of education' (2020, p.614). Canning and Masika explain how the notion of scholarship has evolved into an 'increasingly inclusive, though nebulous understanding through which anything from personal reflection, sharing of good practice through to the publication of the findings from major research projects is in scope as "SoTL"' (2022, p.1091). In a recent study about role descriptors and promotion criteria for education-focused academics in 48 UK universities, the researchers found that only two institutions offered a definition of scholarship (Smith and Walker, 2021, p.117). The University of Bristol defined it as 'engaging in scholarship of the theory and practice of education to engender innovative and evidence-led approaches to teaching'. Meanwhile, Queen Mary University of London offered a more comprehensive view:

> Scholarship includes publishing the outcomes of any pedagogic work in outlets of appropriate standing and influence, leading and contributing to bids for funding for student

> experience and education, or other scholarship activities in line with the overall strategy of the School/Institute and Faculty. It also covers work to influence the higher education agenda in a specific disciplinary area or more generally, and using scholarship to engage in a range of activities that influence society, economy, industry, government or public policy.

The lines between what constitutes scholarship and the rest of the activities in the spectrum of academic work are blurred, and the inconsistency shown by different approaches does not help to clarify concepts. In truth, as long as academic work meets quality standards that are appropriate for the higher education context (such as those laid out by Glassick, Huber and Maeroff[1]), labels such as *scholarship* and *research* are meaningless with regard to content, purpose and positive influence: they are only used to reinforce divisions and hierarchical relations in academic departments. Bruce Macfarlane sheds a much-needed ray of light to the matter of what constitutes scholarship by relativising the question:

> I believe that the distinction between 'subject-based' and 'pedagogic' research is entirely erroneous. What really matters is whether a piece of research is based on sound methods, has something interesting or useful to 'say' and has been properly peer reviewed before publication. The only important distinction is between good research and poor research. However, it is hard to undo the now widespread perception that research about 'learning and teaching' of any kind exists in some sort of separate, box marked 'second rate' (2011, pp.127-128).

My first-hand experiences with the institutional attempts to define scholarship reflect faithfully the vagueness highlighted in the literature. From simple tasks that should be routine in the work of every university teacher (such as keeping up to date with the literature on teaching in the discipline, or adopting technology solutions to support teaching and learning) to activities that could be considered akin to those conducted by research-active colleagues in Education departments (such as publishing peer-reviewed papers about teaching and learning), we were told that *everything* was scholarship. This hyper inclusive approach is a threat to the scholarly aspects of scholarship, as Canning and Masika have noted (2022, p.2). After ten years of immersion in this seemingly encouraging rhetoric, I could only manage to figure out one thing: scholarship was everything but *Research* with a capital R –that is, the kind of research that matters because it can be included in the Research Excellence Framework (REF). All the rest was deemed insubstantial: from sharing a small-

[1] Clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, reflective critique (1997, p.25).

scale teaching innovation with colleagues in your department to presenting or publishing at peer-reviewed international outputs, it was all worth the same. If it was not to be included in the REF, it had no value.

The invisibility of non REF-able[2] work carried out by education-focused academics has been highlighted by Tierney (2020) and Smith and Walker (2021). Research from academics in teaching-intensive posts is excluded from the REF because it's not considered good enough to perform well (Macfarlane, 2011). The fact that this judgement is, by default, extended to all the scholarly work from academics in education-focused positions shows that institutional expectations towards their performance are hopelessly low.

Vagueness of criteria for the evaluation of scholarship: in the realm of micropolitics

The absence of objective criteria for the assessment of scholarship activity is a natural consequence of its lack of definition. There is no clear set of characteristics as to what constitutes scholarship, let alone good quality scholarship (Black, 2024; Canning and Masika, 2022; Higher Education Academy, 2016). The problem is aggravated by the fact that, in the absence of clear parameters, scholarship assessment is easily conditioned by office politics and, therefore, subject to the whims and fancies of the individuals who have been tasked with its assessment: 'Peer reviewers are also sometimes compromised by office politics. In SoTL promotion cases, they let through candidates supplying mediocre curriculum or unoriginal teaching materials as "evidence" of "scholarship"' (Boshier, 2009, p.11). When assessment criteria are open to interpretation, the ground is laid for the working of micropolitics, defined by Alan Davies as 'strategies such as power, coercion, cooperation, cooption and influence to obtain resources and achieve goals' (2009, p.45).

As a result of the vague notion of scholarship that my institution had put into circulation, criteria for assessment were just as undefined: there can be no clear criteria for assessment when the object of assessment is not neatly defined. This difficulty, serious enough in itself, was compounded with the absence of figures who could lead on the development of a scholarship profile for language teachers: as we shall see below, the individuals who could have fulfilled this role operated on the margins of departmental decision-making, and so were not in a position to evaluate the work of others. In this state of affairs, the assessment of scholarship activity was left in the hands of individuals who had no experience of scholarship themselves, an occurrence that is not uncommon in research-intensive universities (Smith and Walker, 2022). The interference of departmental politics, as described in the

[2] The term *REF-able* is taken from a paper published by Michael McEwan (2022).

literature, was omnipresent in this context. Because scholarship assessment occupied a subsidiary role in the face of research assessment, there was no monitoring of the scholarship evaluation process. Going adrift, the evaluation of scholarship played no role in judgements about progression and promotion of teaching staff: these decisions were left entirely to the personal preference of a few individuals who would never be held accountable for their decisions.

Lack of institutional support: left to our own devices

Institutional support for scholarship can take different shapes: financial assistance to attend conferences and scientific meetings and / or to publish research outcomes, or logistical support by freeing up time that could be dedicated to intellectual enquiry. Input from staff in teaching roles shows that lack of available time is, by far, the biggest obstacle to the conduct of scholarship: even when language practitioners are encouraged to do scholarship, the demands of teaching, assessment and student support put a tremendous strain on their time, to the extent that there is no place for scholarship in their schedules (Cobb, 2024; Coderch, 2023).

Besides these obstacles to scholarship activity, a factor that hindered the scholarly potential of language practitioners in my institution was the lack of examples of what good scholarship looked like in our particular context. A personal and honest account of someone who had managed to develop a language teaching scholarship profile in that precise environment would have been an inspiration to the rest of language practitioners. Sadly, opportunities to engage with individuals who could act as role models were not available. Mentoring programmes did exist, but they seemed to be based on a random allocation of mentors to mentees and, worse yet, they were perceived as an unnecessary burden that nobody took seriously. To use the term coined by Babcock, Peyser, Vesterlund and Weingart, mentoring was seen as a 'non-promotable task' (NPT), that is, a task that 'matters to your organization but will not help you advance your career' (2022, p.17). As such, mentoring could not be relied upon as a means to supporting the scholarship of language practitioners. The absence of internal role models who could support and guide the professional development and progression of education-focused staff has been blamed for the feelings of isolation and inadequacy often experienced by practitioners in these positions (Simmons, Eady, Scharff and Gregory, 2021; Smith and Walker, 2022).

Years into my teaching role, I found out, by pure coincidence, that there were, indeed, examples of quality language teaching scholarship among our staff, but these were never highlighted or talked about in school meetings. In fact, the colleagues responsible for these rare examples of good scholarship kept a consistently low profile. Whether this discretion was deliberate or not, I did not know. It was hard to understand why the expertise and talent of these individuals was not being put to good use in a leading role. Their input would have been extremely beneficial for the language practitioners who wished to develop their scholarly profile.

THE TAKEAWAY: HOW TO MAKE SCHOLARSHIP COUNT

Still, for many of us, scholarship was the last resort to find fulfilment and satisfaction in a context ruthlessly dominated by the obsessions with research funding, world rankings and student recruitment (Fanghanel, 2013). Over the years, I came to believe that, for all the institutional talk about the benefits of the scholarship of teaching and learning, nobody in management actually believed that teaching staff would find the time, energy and motivation to produce good quality scholarship. When this happened, there was nowhere for scholarship to go: on the occasions when dissemination took place, it was always at a small scale, confined to the lowly ranks of teaching-only staff (and, therefore, deprived of visibility at departmental level). The implementation of scholarship-led changes in teaching and learning seemed like a titanic task in front of the 'if ain't broken, don't fix it' partisans. For all these reasons, the scholarship activity of language practitioners was often met with a mixture of bewilderment and suspicion: the low expectations of managers had been defied, and there was no action plan for it.

Language practitioners in research-intensive institutions must defend the haven of freedom and space for intellectual enquiry (however bruised and battered it is) that scholarship represents. To do this, there are a few imperative developments. We must fight for a clear framework of scholarship evaluation. We must demand that scholarship activity is subject to a rigorous, transparent and objective assessment process, preferably involving blind peer-review and external assessors, just as with any other academic endeavour that university managers take seriously enough. This new, reliable assessment process would generate valuable information that could be used in promotion and progression panels to reward the efforts of language practitioners. Only through a process of regulation and standardisation of assessment procedures will scholarship be in a position to drop the 'research for losers' label that has been carrying for a long time.

As Ding and Bruce eloquently put it, 'Practitioners are essential to many universities across the globe, but are not part of the essence of a university' (2017, p.204). At a time when Boyer's essay is being subject to a rereading that reclaims one of the purposes of its original spirit, that is, the promotion of social justice among students (Chick, 2023), an opportunity opens to expand this call for social justice to staff too. Through the implementation of a robust and transparent system of evaluation and rewards for scholarship, we would reduce the gap in academic privilege between research-active and teaching-focused staff, making recognition and the attainment of symbolic power available to all (Andreassen, 2023). This would be a true step towards a more egalitarian and inclusive academia.

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