Perspectives

The Margins as *Third Space*: EAP Teacher Professionalism in Canadian Universities

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Teachers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in the Canadian university setting often experience professional marginalization in terms of lack of status, clarity of mandate, or administrative home within their institutions. Despite having broadly benefitted the ESL/EAL sector in Canada, traditional trait-focused professionalization efforts have been less effective at countering this marginalization of EAP teachers within our universities. However, these margins could be reimagined as a pedagogically innovative space for some university EAP teachers to define their professionalism in terms not of what they are, but what they do. Recharacterizing the margins as a third space (Whitchurch, 2008) could allow a degree of freedom for EAP teachers to best exercise their professionalism on their own terms: a postmodern professionalism focused on engagement, service, and collaboration.

Les enseignants d'anglais académique en milieu universitaire canadien se retrouvent souvent marginalisés sur le plan professionnel quant à leur statut, à la clarté de leur mandat ou à leur niche administrative au sein de leur établissement. Les efforts traditionnels relatifs aux développement professionnel des enseignants visent des traits et, si leurs bienfaits se sont fait largement ressentir dans le secteur canadien de l'ALS/ALA, ils ont moins bien réussi à contrer cette marginalisation des enseignants d'anglais académique dans nos universités. Toutefois, ces frontières pourraient être repensées comme des espaces pédagogiques novateurs où des enseignants d'anglais académique à l'université définissent leur professionnalisme, pas en termes de ce qu'ils sont, mais en termes de ce qu'ils font. La requalification des frontières comme un troisième espace (Whitchurch, 2008) pourrait créer un niveau de liberté permettant aux enseignants d'anglais académique de mettre en pratique leur professionnalisme à leur manière : un professionnalisme postmoderne axé sur l'engagement, le service et la collaboration.

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By some accounts, the English language teaching (ELT) sector, which includes teachers, students, and institutions, occupies a marginalized status in

Canada. Permeability of the profession, lack of a defined teacher career path, and poor working conditions have been documented in private, government-sponsored, and postsecondary English teaching contexts (Breshears, 2004, 2008; MacPherson, Kouritzin, & Kim, 2005; Shaw, 2014; Smithwick, 2014; Valeo & Faez, 2014). Although seen by some as offering comparatively better working conditions, the university environment is not without its own unique challenges to English teachers' professionalism. Despite the fact that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teaching centres are now present at the majority of the country's postsecondary institutions, EAP teachers and students often operate on the margins. There is some degree of ambiguity from students, the university community, and sometimes EAP teachers themselves as to their role and status within the university. In my professional context as an EAP instructor at the English language teaching centre at a medium-sized, research-intensive Canadian university, I have personally had EAP students question my qualifications, asking if I had "finished my studies yet." I have heard students in our centre's presessional EAP course ask "when [they will be] taking a real course," contrasting their EAP studies with their future degree program. This is despite the fact that job advertisements for many EAP programs at Canada's universities require instructors to hold advanced degrees and postsecondary teaching experience on par with many other instructors across the university. Social and administrative status differentials often persist between EAP programs and other programs at the institution.

What is the nature of this marginalization of the teaching and learning of EAP in university settings in Canada? It encompasses status, structure, and position within the institution. EAP often does not have a set disciplinary home, and a great variety of models for EAP exist across the country: by some reports, there are "almost as many different kinds of [university English for Academic Purposes] programs as there [are] universities in Canada" (Douglas, 2016). EAP teaching units could be housed in student services, an academic department, centres for continuing or extended studies, the library, or independent centres; teachers of EAP could be faculty members, but are more likely to be short-term or contractual instructors. There is little research on professionalism and EAP teaching in Canadian universities apart from Smithwick's 2014 dissertation on an EAP program in Ontario. He details the challenges to the professional status and working conditions of the institution's EAP unit, which, despite being an "essential service" (p. 274) to the university due to its gate-keeping function in the admissions process, is nevertheless an "appendage unit" (p. 3) and "is situated in a subordinate position in relation to other academic disciplines and programs that operate within the same university structure" (p. 267). This is evidenced by exclusion from the institution's strategic plan, relegation to subpar facilities, lower instructor pay, and lack of autonomy over certain aspects of its own curriculum and scheduling.

This marginalization seems to stem in part from a lack of understanding of the knowledge base of education, specifically that of ELT and EAP. Another contributing factor could be the idea within the university environment that "teaching is not perceived to be a significant aspect of scholarly work" (Pratt, 1997, p. 1). In the UK, Fulcher (2009) found EAP to be lacking the academic status of modern foreign languages at many universities, as teachers of EAP are seen as "merely" teachers with no research mandate. The field of ELT suffers doubly as the knowledge base of education in general is not well defined (Lortie, 1975), nor is there one agreed epistemology of professional knowledge for the English teacher (Liyanage, Walker, & Singh, 2015). For many both inside and outside the field of ELT, the native-speaker ideal still pervades: if you can speak a language, you can teach it (Johnston, 1997; Phan & Le, 2013). The view persists within many academic settings that the knowledge base of English language teachers is "lower" than that of other academic subjects (Sato, 2013). The field of education is viewed similarly; in the words of Maxwell (2014):

Despite decades spent attempting to develop specialised science-based instructional knowledge and transfer it to teaching practice ..., there is a persistent belief not just among the general public but among teachers too, that good teaching is more of a knack than a highly-trained skill. (p. 15)

There have been initiatives to define the EAP knowledge base, such as the British Association of Lecturers in EAP (BALEAP) Teaching EAP Competency framework, a "description of best practices in the field," which institutions can voluntarily use to guide "recruitment, induction, classroom observation, and professional development of teachers" (Alexander, 2010, p. 6). This is, however, only one limited attempt to define this base of knowledge, and there is no documentation of its application outside the UK.

There is also a general devaluing of language teaching work by the academic community and society at large. Turner (2004) laments the "emaciation of [language learning] as an intellectual challenge" (p. 95) within institutional frameworks, which favour a "technicisation" of language, reducing it into proficiency test scores to satisfy an entry requirement. This denies what she sees as the "constitutive" role of language as an inextricable part of academic work. Several researchers (Fulcher, 2009; Hadley, 2015; Sato, 2013; Smithwick, 2014; Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2007; Turner, 2004) report association of their EAP work within the university to a discourse of "student deficiency and remediation" (Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2007, p. 47). This discourse is in stark contrast to the teaching of languages other than English taking place in university foreign languages departments. That EAP is seen as remedial, while beginner French or Spanish is not, is a minimization of the complexity of language work and language acquisition only in the case of learners of English. This belies the "tacit [English] monolingualism" (Horner & Trimbur, 2002,

p. 597) that permeates institutions, curricula, and course requirements, and marginalizes those multilingual international students whose first language is not English. In the general sphere, many teachers of English to adults feel they work in "leftover spaces, ... for little money or professional status, with students who are ignored and excluded by the dominant society" (Willet & Jeannot, 1993, p. 477). Similarly, EAP teaching within the university necessarily is associated with this marginalized group, and by association gains a lower status. At many Canadian institutions, for example in British Columbia, the battle is being fought to set up credit-bearing EAP courses (Douglas, 2012) and to gain acceptance of EAP study as a complex, rigorous discipline: something beyond simple remediation.

Professionalism or Professionalization?

In the face of marginalization and in order to improve status and standing in society at large, other occupational groups, such as nurses and accountants, have undertaken professionalization projects: the establishment of a professional body or association that is autonomous and self-regulated, and that upholds the principles of a clear path into the profession, professional certification or accreditation, and a code of professional conduct. The professionalization project establishes who has the training, knowledge, skills, and conduct to belong to the group; it establishes insiders and outsiders and, in so doing, raises the status of the profession. To quote Breshears (2004):

[One] argument for professionalization of language teachers is that it will bring with it higher standards of pay, benefits, and working conditions. The standards that limit access, and thus create scarcity, are necessary for maintaining a high value on the goods inherent in the profession." (pp. 27–28)

Indeed, this enhancement of status has been one of the goals of the professionalization of ELT in Canada: the teacher certification scheme, code of conduct, professional community, and advocacy of the TESL Canada professionalization project (Sivell, 2005), along with the activities of the various provincial teachers' associations. Although not without its documented challenges, such as the lack of an enforcement mechanism of its code of conduct (Breshears, 2004; MacPherson et al., 2005) the TESL Canada project has achieved a general increase in the status of adult ELT in the country, especially with regard to standardization and recognition of credentials and the overall perception of the field of adult ELT as a trustworthy and accountable one built around expertise (Sivell, 2005). This is the case particularly since the inception of its teacher certification scheme in 2002, and with teachers in government-sponsored immigrant language programs (Burnaby, 2003; Chafe & Wang, 2008; Sivell, 2005). However, these and other status-raising measures for English teachers do not seem to penetrate the figurative "walls" of the

university. Universities have their own power and organizational structures, values, and practices, and the marginalization that our EAP centres, staff, and students experience within the wider university community persists, in spite of the gains made elsewhere by TESL Canada's initiatives.

The question arises, then, of how to address the professional challenges of EAP teachers in the university context in Canada. One possibility could be a shift from traditional professionalization projects—rooted in classical trait-theories of what characteristics an occupational group must have to be considered a profession—to a focus on professionalism defined by a "professional group's conduct, demeanour and the standards which guide it" (Hextall, Gewirtz, Cribb, & Mahony, 2007, p. 32). In other words, this is a shift from what a professional is to what one does. One example of this is the postmodern professionalism proposed by Goodson and Hargreaves (1996). Their postmodern professionalism is "one which is guided by moral and socio-political visions of the purposes which teacher professionalism should serve within actively caring communities and vigorous social democracies" (p. 20). This focus on teachers' conduct allows for a complex and nuanced professionalism, one which "maximise[s] discretionary judgment, embrace[s] moral and social purposes, forge[s] cultures of collaboration along with self-directed commitments to continuous improvement, and embod[ies] heteronomy, complexity and commitment to care" (p. 21). This postmodern professionalism may be a more fruitful source of professional identity for university EAP teachers in the university environment in Canada, but the question remains how to enact it.

EAP Professionalism in the *Third Space*

In what way can this postmodern professional identity be practiced by university EAP teachers in Canada? Helpful to this examination is some reimagining: the margins in which many university EAP teachers operate can be envisioned as a third space. Whitchurch (2008) describes the third space in higher education contexts as one which exists "between the traditional binary of an academic domain and an administrative or management domain that supports this" (p. 378). Third space professionals exist in different contexts across the university and have mixed identities: they straddle the professional and academic domains in that they are not faculty members, whose work traditionally includes research, teaching, and "third-leg" functions, nor are they strictly administrators supporting the academic domain. They may have advanced academic credentials and be involved in teaching, curriculum development, or research, but their duties may also involve collaboration in inter-institutional teams on academic, managerial, or policy-related issues. Examples of third space professionals are librarians, those who perform educational outreach or maintain academic partnerships, and those who run business/technology incubators on campus.

University EAP teachers could be classified as third space professionals in terms of the literal and figurative spaces they occupy and the roles they carry out. As described above, EAP units are often located outside academic departments in any number of institutional "locations" which could be classified as third spaces: student services, centres for continuing studies, libraries, or independent centres. Regarding their status, many EAP teachers in Canada are often not full-time faculty members. While holding academic credentials and being able to enter into academic discourse, EAP teachers perform "perimeter roles" (Whitchurch, 2013, p. 25); their work includes teaching and curriculum design, but this activity often differs from the teaching done in academic units by faculty members. Much EAP teaching is noncredit, and sometimes delivered in alternative formats such as intensive programs, small workshops, or even one-on-one. The nature of work in the third space seems to be less bound by definitions and categories that exist in the traditional academic or administrative domains. Whitchurch's (2008) empirical research on activity in the third space found "individuals ... not only interpreting their given roles more actively ... but ... also moving laterally across functional and organizational boundaries to create new professional spaces, knowledges and relationships" (p. 4). In other words, there is substantial leeway for EAP teachers, as professionals working in the third space, to do things they see most fruitful in terms of their knowledge, work, and professional collaboration.

Inasmuch as it is possible in many Canadian institutions, university EAP teachers should see the blended nature of their positions on many campuses as an opportunity. It is true that every institution has a unique environment, and ecosystem and not all third spaces lend themselves to the types of activities to counter marginalization that will be suggested below. For example, Hadley's (2015) detailed examination of EAP in the third space of neoliberal universities found the third space environment was often associated with creating "atmospheres of instability" (p. 158) and teachers of EAP were becoming "increasingly dislocated from their vocational identities as a result of organizational dynamics that have blurred traditional boundaries" (p. 158). The third space may therefore provide a place where a lack of professionalism displays itself in teacher behaviour: Hadley (2015) reported disrupted communication with superiors or "sharp fluctuations in workflow" by some EAP teachers who experience "professional disarticulation" in the third space environment (p. 57).

Nevertheless, within a university community that "pins [them] to the margins" (Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2007, p. A44), many university EAP teachers have the opportunity to play an active role in countering marginalization and a potential lack of professionalism. A certain degree of status-building can be accomplished by way of the quality of the engagement and pedagogy provided to students and other stakeholders by those of us who teach and lead EAP programs, and the networks we build across campus. What follow

are more examples of how the third space can be recharacterized as a space where professionalism can be enhanced.

Embracing the Third Space to Enhance Professionalism

Professional culture. Professional culture is "shared ideologies, values, and general ways of and attitudes to working" (Evans, 2008). EAP teachers in Canada can aim to create a professional culture in their third spaces that embodies their own definition of professionalism in terms of extended professional activity, collegiality, and freedom to experiment. Hoyle (1975) contrasts the restricted professional, narrowly focused on the "day-to-day practicalities of teaching" (Evans, 2008, p. 9), with the extended professional, who shows a "much wider vision of what education involves, valuing the theory underpinning pedagogy, and the adoption of a generally intellectual and rationally-based approach to the job" (Evans, 2008, p. 9). Extended professional activity can be fostered in EAP units: this I see within my own centre as well as with my peers from EAP centres across the country who present at conferences, write for a variety of professional publications, are involved in provincial and national professional associations and committees, and pursue continuing professional development. There is leeway for much collaboration and cooperation in these activities; this is the "reinterpretation of collegiality" (Taylor, 2008, p. 38) that is characteristic of the third space professional.

Third spaces bring a variety of attributes. Whitchurch (2008) describes the third space as a safe space to experiment with new forms of activity. Outside of the confines of an academic department, EAP teachers have more freedom to experiment in the classroom and push their limits as practitioners. Hadley (2015) identifies one "third space solution" to the problem of role ambiguity and loss of status associated with the move of EAP teachers into the third space as embracing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) movement, which represents "innovation, [improving] content delivery to end users, [a focus] on stakeholder needs, [achievement of] excellence and [creation of] a positive, inclusive teaching environment free of class-based recriminations" (p. 163). Anecdotally, I have seen colleagues at my institution and at other universities across the country use the fact that they are not confined to the typical three-credit, 39-hour course mould to their advantage in order to experiment and innovate professionally. As many intensive EAP programs already differ from much of the teaching that happens on campus in format, frequency, class sizes, and other constraints, they use this freedom to innovate in the realms of materials development, experimentation with technology, development of task-based learning activities, or participation in peer observation cycles, to name a few examples.

Freedom in the margins. Not all university EAP teachers are in a position to spearhead institutional initiatives, but those who can should "use ... ambiguity to advantage" (Whitchurch, 2008, p. 388), and draw on the third space

as space to innovate projects born not necessarily from an institutional mandate, but from the "commitment to altruistic service" (Runte & Taylor, 1995) and "active care" (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 20) that figures prominently in a postmodern definition of professionalism. EAP teachers and those who lead EAP programs can cross institutional boundaries to offer expertise in the area of language acquisition and internationalization to various units around the institution. For example, perhaps a certain group of international students in a particular department have shown that they are underserved by existing linguistic support mechanisms on campus. An EAP unit could intervene to take a student-centred approach to building a support course, drawing on research and best practices in the field, in collaboration with the academic department in question and the international students' centre. EAP units can display an "occupational heteronomy rather than self-protective autonomy, where teachers work authoritatively yet openly and collaboratively with other partners in the wider community" (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 21).

There are examples of this, both published and unpublished, from contexts in Canada and around the world. An example from an EAP context in the UK is detailed by Sloan and Porter (2009). An innovative model of contextualization, embedding, and mapping was used to guide the creation of EAP support for students in a postgraduate management course. Intra-institutional collaboration between a traditional academic department (business, in this case) and a third space unit (EAP) is a key element to this project, and it is unique in this case that the EAP unit works with the business department, rather than for it. Melles, Millar, Morton, and Fegan (2005) offer an example of a collaborative effort between the faculty of architecture and the English language teaching unit at an Australian university to develop an obligatory, first-year, credit-bearing core course focusing on disciplinary communication. In these examples, other principles of postmodern professionalism are also present: a recognition by all stakeholders of the complexity of language and language learning and the EAP unit's expertise in the area, opportunities for teachers to "engage with the ... social purposes and value of what [they] teach" (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 21), and a commitment to student care. From their third space, EAP units can ideally shape projects and their roles in them as they see fit.

Conclusion

TESL Canada and its professionalization project will continue, as will provincial initiatives. Certain gains that will be achieved for the ELT profession as a whole may filter into the university setting. In the meantime, EAP teachers in postsecondary settings should not look solely to professional associations for a definition of EAP teacher professionalism and instead opt to embrace the third space, creating environments where a collaborative and complex

professionalism can flourish. Professionalism enacted from the third space may even result in a movement of EAP out of the margins. Smithwick (2014) describes how a focus on an innovative and expertly delivered and designed EAP curriculum at his institution played a key role in driving the university's recognition of the EAP unit as an "essential service" (p. 246). This resulted in recommendations for increased support for the unit in terms of increased recognition, financial contributions, and regularization of contracts and pay for instructors.

At many Canadian institutions, the surge in on-campus EAP provision has arrived hand-in-hand with globalization and internationalization of the university, and institutions are still trying to figure out what EAP is, where EAP fits, what EAP practitioners do, and how to work with us. Those of us who teach and oversee EAP programs must take the lead. Amongst competing demands of institutions, global markets, the Canadian ELT professionalization projects, and our students themselves, reimagining the margins as third space is, for the present time, a way to provide a definition of professionalism unique to the Canadian university EAP context.

The Author

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