Power and the Canadian EAP Practitioner

Multiethnography as Resistance?

Jen

Research Participants

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Jonathan Mendelsohn, York University
Leo Gomez, Independent

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Jon

Today's Session

- Rationale and Objectives
- EAP in Canada: Literature
- Multiethnography as Critical Methodology
- Findings: Convergence and Divergence in our Conversations
- Discussion
- Conclusions: improving Practitioners' Work Lives
- Q & A

Jon

Rationale, Objectives, & Literature

Jen

EAP across Canada: Programs and Practitioners

Jen

EAP across Canada: Programs and Practitioners

- **EAP Assessment** (e.g., Huang, 2018)
- **EAP Impact** (e.g., Fox et al., 2013)
- **EAP Teacher / student beliefs** (e.g., Douglas et al., 2022; Douglas & Kim, 2014)
- **EAP & L2 Writing Pedagogies** (e.g., Bhowmik et al., 2021; Galante, 2020; Marshall & Walsh Marr, 2018; Van Viegen & Zappa-Hollman, 2020)
- **EAP Programming** (MacDonald, 2022; Corcoran et al., 2021; Douglas & Landry, 2021; Dyck, 2013)
- EAP Practitioners (Breshears, 2019; Corcoran et al., in press; MacDonald, 2016; Valeo & Faez, 2013;)

Jen

Lens and Orientations

James

EAP Orientations: Service vs. Field

EAP as a Service (Neoliberal)	EAP as a Field (Critical-Pragmatic)
Market-driven	Research, theory, and practice-driven
Profit-generating or bust	Disinterested in finance
English as commodity	English as meaning-making, discursive set of tools
English as "problem" that can be fixed, often in short amounts of time	English as a language to be wielded in increasingly complex ways over time = discursive competence
Support for the disciplines	A sub-discipline (subsumed under Educational Linguistics OR English for Specific Purposes)
Practitioners as disposable labour, separate from academy	Practitioners as permanent, integrated members of academy
Practitioners as language teachers	Practitioners as researcher-teachers

James

CALx Lens

Critical applied linguistics (CALx) lens (Pennycook, 2021)

Draws upon both neo-marxist (Block, 2015; Hadley, 2015) and post-structuralist (Canagarajah, 2017; Sousa Santos & Menezes, 2020) approaches to language (teaching) and (social relations of) power.

Adopting this multifaceted CALx lens affords an interrogation of power-imbued issues related to "the contingent and contextual effects of power in relation to access, exclusion, reproduction, and resistance" (Pennycook, 2021, p. 162) within Canadian EAP.

For our study, we are interested in reconciling social structures with EAP practitioners' perceived professional agency, or capability to **"act, initiate, self-regulate, or make differences or changes to their situation."** (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2021, p. 1.)

Methodology & RQs

Methodology

Research Design
- ○ Qualitative paradigm
- ○ Participants are both researchers and researched
- ○ Storytelling
- ○ Positioned as a bridge between theory, research, and practice (ideal for us)

Sampling & Participants
- ● EAP directors and instructors from private EAL, college and university contexts invited to participate

Data collection
- ● Four two-hour conversations conducted and recorded via Zoom
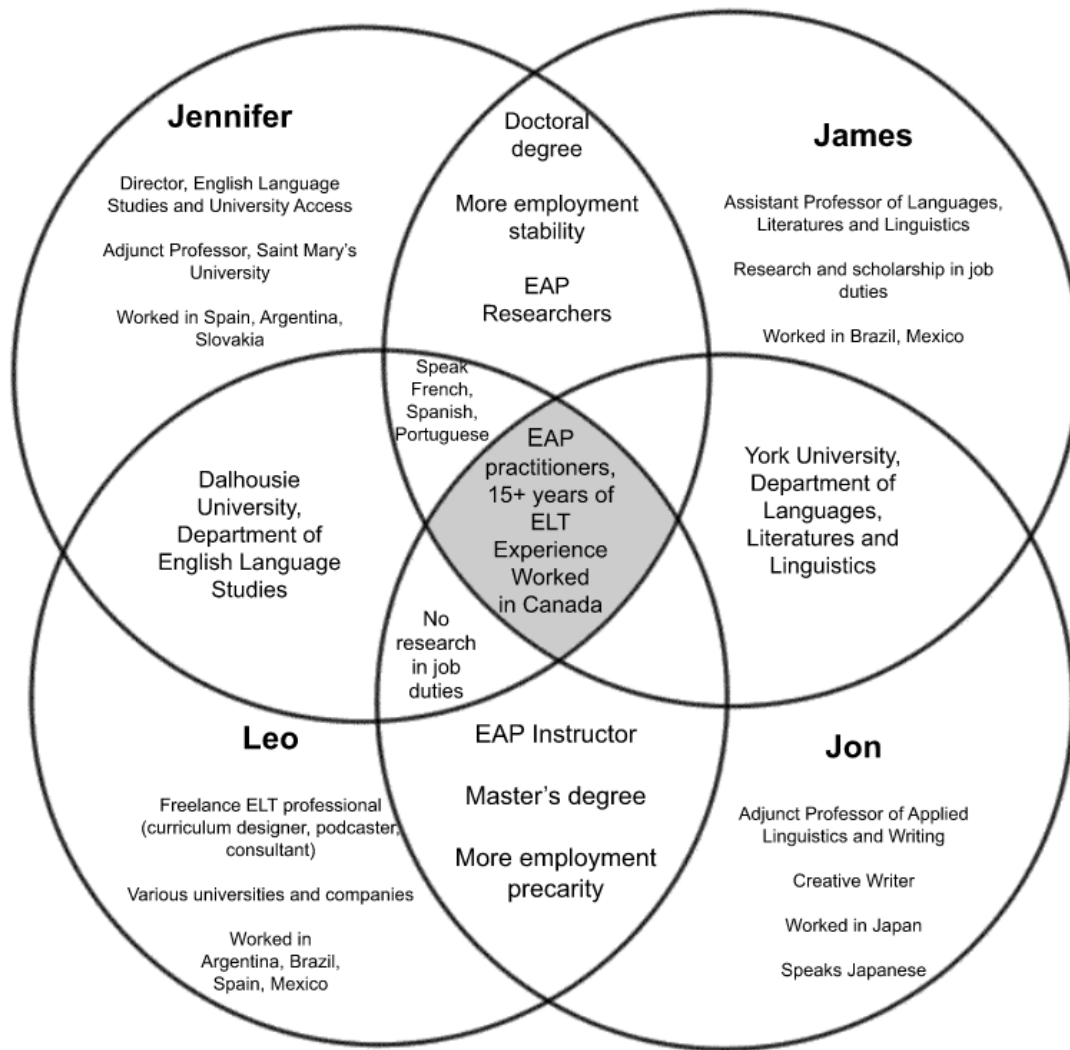- ● Additional notes via shared Google Drive

Data analysis
- ● Multi-level, inter-rater coding of group interviews to flesh out and agree on main themes, followed by specific coding of most salient elements related to power, agency, and EAP
- ● Mixing of data into narrative form (actually another level of analysis)
- ● Inter-participant polishing of conversations to provide coherence

James

Research Questions

- How do we perceive our roles as EAP practitioners?
- How do we navigate our EAP professional lives?
- What are the salient features of Canadian EAP?

Participants

Jennifer

Director, English Language Studies and University Access

Adjunct Professor, Saint Mary's University

Worked in Spain, Argentina, Slovakia

Doctoral degree

More employment stability

EAP Researchers

James

Assistant Professor of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics

Research and scholarship in job duties

Worked in Brazil, Mexico

Speak French, Spanish, Portuguese

EAP practitioners, 15+ years of ELT Experience Worked in Canada

Dalhousie University, Department of English Language Studies

York University, Department of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics

No research in job duties

Leo

Freelance ELT professional (curriculum designer, podcaster, consultant)

Various universities and companies

Worked in Argentina, Brazil, Spain, Mexico

EAP Instructor

Master's degree

More employment precarity

Jon

Adjunct Professor of Applied Linguistics and Writing

Creative Writer

Worked in Japan

Speaks Japanese

Jon

Findings

Overview

Convergent Themes

The dedication of EAP practitioners to student life and learning outcomes

The challenges of carving out a career in EAP

Divergent Themes

The optimum qualifications for EAP instructors

The benefits of professional development within EAP programs,

The place of unions

Jen

EAP Competencies, Credentials & Autonomy

Leo: I've been teaching in this [university] program for, maybe seven years, and classroom teaching is how you learn most. **Experience is key.**

Jon: Totally agree.

Jennifer: From the EAP director point of view, **providing regular PD and teacher development in-house to complement classroom teaching experience is essential**...alongside the usually non-existent formal EAP training that most people have never had...it is really hard to meet practitioners where they are.

Jon

EAP Competencies, Credentials & Autonomy

James: Well, I love teaching, period...but my graduate degrees have opened the door to a broader EAP experience. In my faculty role, I can do research and some theorizing, both of which allow me to understand and engage with my professional practice in ways that would not be possible otherwise. I**'m still unsure, though, which teaching credentials and degrees should be mandatory for EAP instructors.**

Jennifer: I'm so with you, James. I'm a massive nerd, I actually like reading and writing and researching – that's a big part of my motivation for doing this. **And I think to myself, how can you have an ounce of credibility teaching thesis writing to a PhD student if you have a bachelor's degree that you did 25 years ago and you haven't written anything academic since?**

Jon

Neoliberal EAP

Jennifer: Canada is the **Wild West for EAP**, with a lot of instructor precarity.

[…]

Jon: I've worked at institutions where you see this **MBA-ification of these EAP programs, where the administration is valued above pedagogy, above teaching and teachers**. I'll never forget a certain Christmas work party. The newly hired head of the EAP program was up on stage giving her big end-of-year speech, thanking the web designers, and the marketing team. **She goes on and on, and never once mentioned the teachers**. She just plum forgot. It just summed up the whole thing for me.

Jen

Neoliberal EAP

James: **EAP programs are almost inevitably looking to maximize profit and that is a deeply problematic model to superimpose on educational activities**. Not all programs are the same, though, nor are the experiences of those working therein. In my university's case, we have credit-bearing EAP courses, which is different than yours [Jennifer] which is a pre-sessional language program.

Jennifer: That being said, yours is an academic unit, with central funding, and so I think it's a bit different than a **cost recovery model, where when you get more students, your centre gets more revenue, and you can hire more teachers, and employ people to do other things.**

Native Speakerism?

Leo: I googled the term precariousness, and the term originates from Latin, which basically relates to the act of praying or asking for favours. **I think a lot of teachers feel like their fate is in the hands of… people who can make or break their lives and probably don't give it much thought.** You know, I immigrated to Canada because I wanted more challenge in my work. But when I first arrived, I couldn't find a job teaching even though I had taught in Argentina and the US and Brazil. I'm like, 'what do you mean Canadian experience? **Because it sounds like a catch 22 to me. How am I going to get Canadian experience if you never offer me a job?'**

[…]

James: […] I think there is a growing recognition from those in the field, though, that the days of native speaker dominance are in the rearview. **For example, I have seen culturally and linguistically representative EAP staffs at most programs in Canada.**

Jen

Unionization

James: As we discuss neoliberal EAP, it occurs to me that we should be discussing ways to combat the disposable labour model that allows for EAP instructors to potentially be mistreated at their institutions. Unions, anyone?

Jon: Ok, but I'm gonna take the other side here regarding unions. You sometimes get [EAP practitioners] who haven't been to a meeting in years because there is no way of forcing them and they, I imagine, don't want to come also because **they feel their voices do not carry the same weight as their tenured or tenure-stream colleagues.**

Jennifer: [...] when COVID hit in the Spring of 2020, at some centres, certain unionized instructors refused to do anything online—it wasn't in their collective agreement. **I heard people saying, "I can't wait to for this online crap to be over, so I can get back to REAL teaching," as if online teaching wasn't teaching.** And I was like, "Do you realize that you have dozens of students and by refusing to teach you're preventing them from graduating?!"

Jon/James

Unionization

James: Seriously, people? **We need more and more powerful unions as a bulwark against the advanced capitalist assault on language education**, no? I am proud to be part of an institution with unions that fight for my rights and the rights of those around me.

Jon: That's the problem, right? The extremes. **I'm deeply grateful for my union and its benefits but am so conflicted about it because we go on strike a lot and I'm constantly terrified they're going to do it again, which could mean far fewer students and my not getting enough work to support my family.** One of these days they're [the union] going to make our university the place that nobody wants to go, and then none of us have work. [...]

Jon/James

Reflections on Multiethnography

Jennifer: **Why do therapy** when you can just do a multiethnography? [...]

Jon: This has been huge for me to just **have my voice heard and to say this is what matters to me.** [...] Also, these conversations have made me t**hink more about my role as a language teacher and how I can best support students** while dealing with all the other bullshit that comes with being a part-timer.

James: It's interesting because I think **we're incentivized to not talk about certain aspects of our profession,** but during this project we have been able to air our grievances and talk about uncomfortable and unequal distribution of power in a comfortable space [...]

Leo: [...] I have to admit that **these chats have actually helped me reflect on my experiences in the profession while sharing perspectives** that I really couldn't share with anyone, especially management.

James

Discussion

Jen

Discussion: Summary

Evidence of conflicting perceptions of EAP instruction ("butler stance" service vs. invaluable support) (Charles & Pecorari, 2016)

Evidence of differential lived experiences and sense of legitimacy/satisfaction between those with and without job stability (Breshears, 2019)

Evidence of contested practitioner sense of agency and asymmetrical relations of power within the market of EAP (Bourdieu, 2012; Ding & Bruce, 2017)

Evidence of dedication by EAP practitioners to improving EAL student learning outcomes / lives

Might this form of doing CALx result in better equipping EAP practitioners for the realities of the "field of battle" (Bourdieu, 2012; Haque, 2007)?

Jen

Multiethnography as Resistance?

- Critical storytelling approaches to research can afford easily accessible (more democratic) engagement with scholarship for diverse population of EAP practitioners
- Multiethnography as affirming and validating for participants (Norris & Sawyer, 2015)
- Can promote camaraderie, shared purpose, and collaborative relations of power between practitioners (Cummins, 2021)
- Challenging of entrenched hierarchies and asymmetrical power relations, potentially leading to a level of critical praxis (Hoggle & Bramble, 2020; Pennycook, 2021).
- Self-reflexivity as critical endeavour in EAP can clearly lead to improved awareness of systemic barriers and heightened social agency; however, it also necessarily leads to uncomfortable moments of heightened tensions (Kennedy & DeCosta, 2023).

James

Conclusions and Future Avenues

James

Improving EAP Practitioners' Work Lives

● Transparent hiring criteria (e.g., education, certification, experience);

● Improvements to working conditions for EAP instructors (e.g., permanent status, regularization, unionization and/or other forms of collective mobilization);

● Incentives for engagement with research and pedagogical innovation;

● Practitioner-driven professional development;

● Collegial exchange of research- and classroom-teaching inspired learnings;

● Program leadership which builds relationships between EAP and other units (e.g., writing centres; disciplinary and administrative units);

● Collective curricular (re)design that includes practitioner input.

Q & A

Power and the Canadian EAP Practitioner

Thank you!

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