

Mediating a role for social justice in the activity of EAP teaching

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Outline of structure

- The context
- Research project overview
- Challenges & contradictions
- Proposed framework
- Issues for discussion

The Context



- Began life on a pre-sessional course - scattering the seeds of an idea to do something connected to social issues
- Very much an Etienne Wenger-esque 1990s notion of organic growth - build topics into the regular course
- Quickly realised we needed something much more structured and cultivated - dedicated electives



The Context

- To create such electives we needed materials and having taught an MA TESOL course realised the paucity of theory regarding the production of materials
- Decided then to investigate how such a course might be designed and how theory might inform it
- Applied for BALEAP funding and got that
- Began a research project that was quite ambitious but felt worthwhile for so many reasons



Research project overview



- ❑ **RQ1: What is meant by Social Justice in EAP teaching and learning contexts, both locally and globally?**
- ❑ **RQ2: How do existing sets of EAP teaching and learning resources incorporate aspects of Social Justice in both materials and curriculum levels?**
 - Curriculum and materials used at UoW pre-sessional courses
 - Bolster & Levrai's (2020) 'Develop EAP: A sustainable Academic English Skills Course'
 - The British Council's 'The Climate Connection course' (ten-part podcast series)

RQ1: What is meant by Social Justice in EAP teaching and learning contexts, both locally and globally?

Locally

- **Linkage between EAP teaching and core values of SJ:** human rights, immigration, child labour, etc.
- **Most critically engaged definition:** *“my definition of social justice relates to power imbalances within society – political, financial, cultural, social power and the interrelationship with factors such as race, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, etc”*.
- **Whose role is it to teach SJ?** More cautious voices: “somebody else’s’ responsibility”
- **Should it be incorporated into EAP teaching?** “Depends on the principles underpinning the curriculum”

Globally

- Perceptions differ according to country of origin, workplace & teaching-learning environments
- **Agreement?** Transgender rights highlighted as very difficult to discuss and certain topics cause teachers to “self-censor”

Conclusion:

Most EAP practitioners are advocates of SJ and general agreement on the necessity of SJ in EAP but... uncertainty as to how theory might relate to practice beyond ad-hoc, context-specific enactments.

RQ2: How do existing sets of EAP teaching and learning resources incorporate aspects of Social Justice in both materials and curriculum levels?

- **Part of a course or one-off lesson?** Encountered both
- **Meet the needs of learners?** Yes, those designed with EAP learners in mind
- **Informed by a particular theory?** EAP materials seem driven or informed by principles of academic language acquisition and development
- **Considerations?** The practical needs e.g. most aim to prepare students for university life through incorporation of academic skills
- **Authentic & expose students to real world language?** Yes but would need to be adapted
- **Scope for input & output?** Yes

RQ2: How do existing sets of EAP teaching and learning resources incorporate aspects of Social Justice in both materials and curriculum levels?

- **Relevant to wider curriculum?** Depends on the ss' course, might have to make special mention to ss disciplines to tie the questions
- **Long term benefits?** Yes, BUT when used with adaptations and highlight these benefits to ss
- **Shortcomings?** Only a few included discursive elements

Conclusion:

Most address issues of Social Justice in one-off lessons, not throughout & need to be adapted

Challenges & Contradictions



A challenging balancing act in terms of managing all of the contradictions and tensions (*snapshot opposite*)

- Assessment and curricular contradictions - the recurring mismatch between what/how we teach and how we assess students (McArthur, Pearson).
- Finding a synergy between 'topics' and the focus of Pre-Sessional courses (*if we even know the focus*) - defining the activity of EAP teaching.
- The justice of Pre-Sessionals in themselves - why do they exist as they do? How are they staffed? Colonialism? Deficit model?
- Challenges and contradictions within a social justice epistemology itself. Fragmented - fractured - a reincarnation of imperialistic divisions.

Challenges & Contradictions

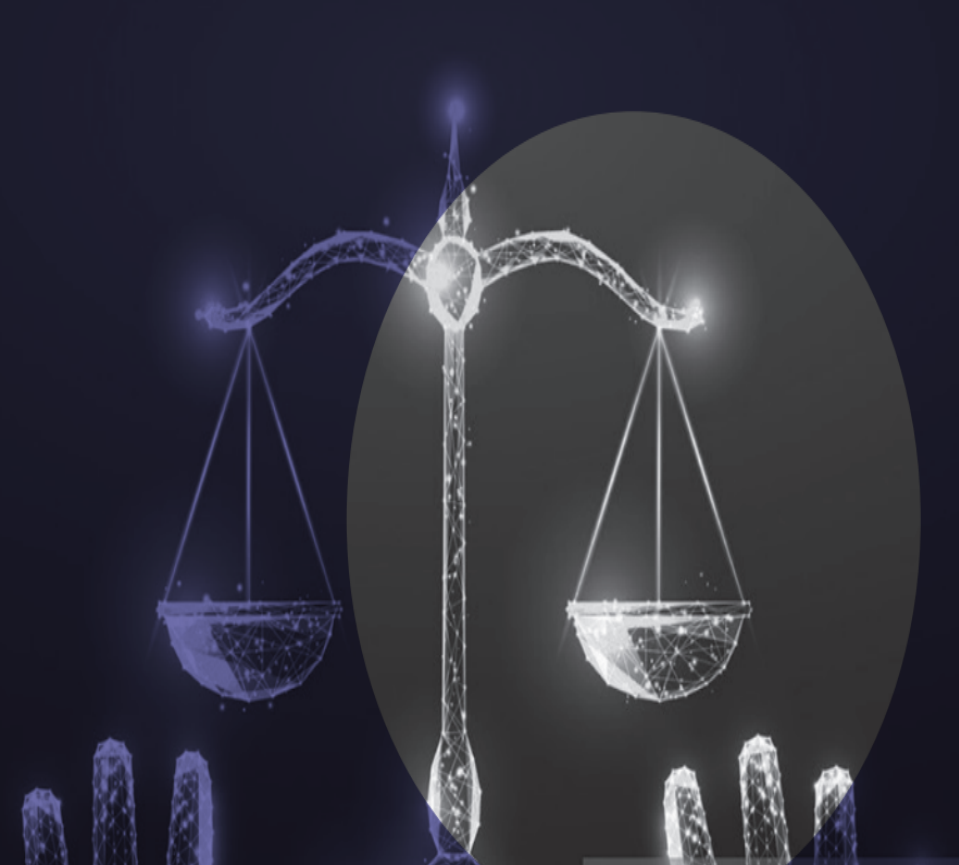
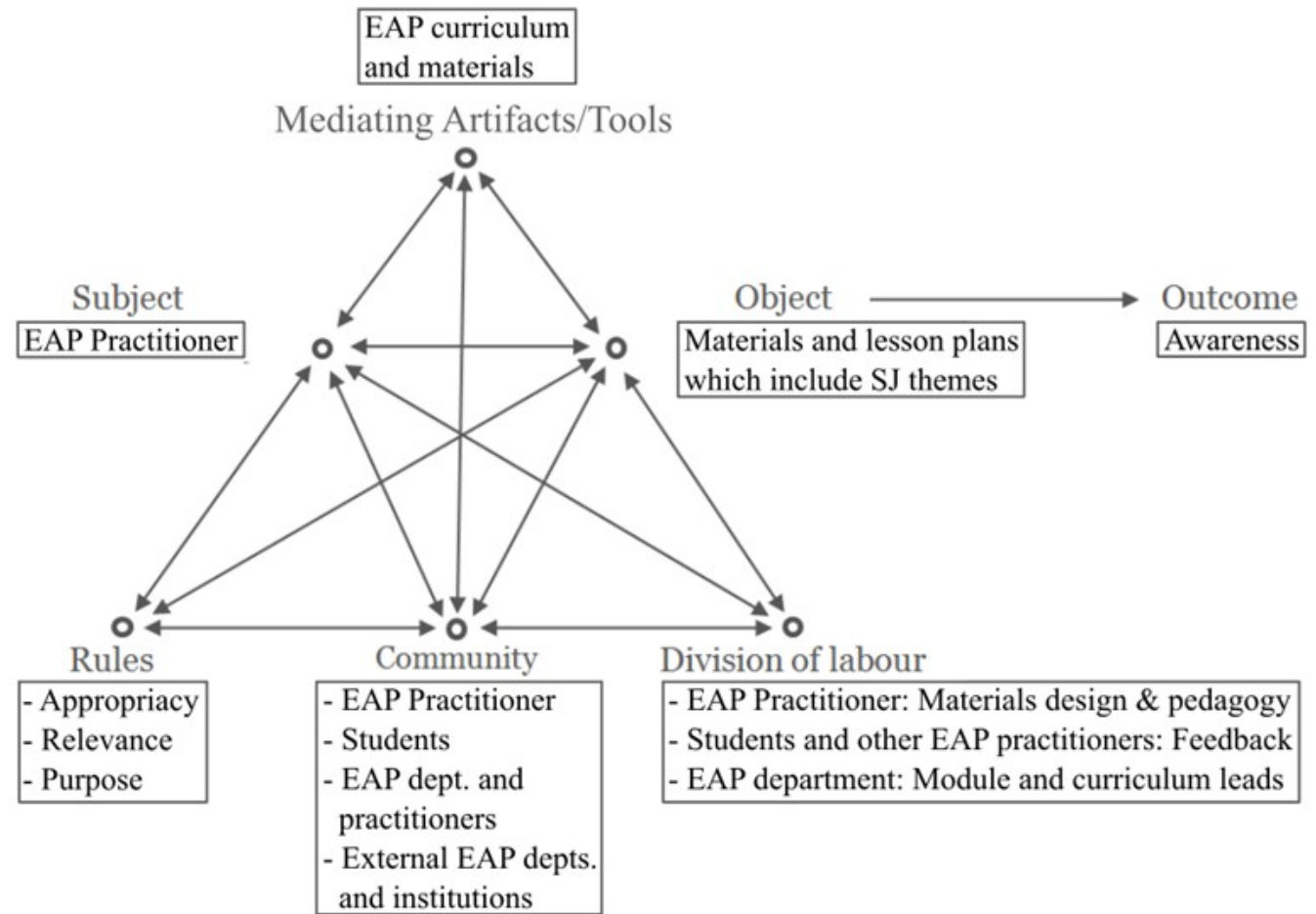


Image opposite accessed at metro.co.uk

A need to join together our respective struggles in terms of who we are (personally/professionally) and what we are trying to achieve regarding Social Justice.

Proposed framework for the design and development of EAP materials / curricula

Proposed framework



Adapted from Engeström (2001)

Issues for discussion

- ☐ Do you see a need for a greater sense of SJ in the EAP classroom?
- ☐ Or do we need a greater sense of EAP/HE ecosystem as a whole?
- ☐ What is your role as an EAP practitioner in relation to SJ?
- ☐ Is the EAP classroom the right place to do this?



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