A large, irregular splash of blue ink on a white background, serving as a backdrop for the title text.

# The professional identity of EAP practitioners: professional knowledge, scholarship and research

- Sarah Taylor

# Presentation structure

- Background to the study
- Theoretical framing
- Findings of the study

# Background

- EdD thesis research
- Lack of research on EAP identity
- Interviews with 17 practitioners in the UK
- Questions about
  - identity
  - issues facing the profession
- Importance of scholarly activity



# Theoretical framing

# General findings

- Fragmented identities
- Occupying liminal space in HE
- Some identifying as marginalised

## Ding and Bruce (2017)

- Insider view of EAP: complex, research-informed academic field
- Outsider view of EAP: profit-making support activity that focuses on outcomes
- Some interviewees aligned themselves with 'outsider view'

# Becker (1963) – ‘master status’

‘Master status’ = core identity  
+ associated auxiliary traits

Two main camps:

## **‘Academic’ master status**

- Auxiliary traits: research active, academic positioning, resisting profit imperative

## **‘Support service’ master status**

- Auxiliary traits: emphasising support function; identifying as ‘not academic’, profit imperative unproblematic

# 'Collective identity' (Johnston et al, 1994)

## 'Effective teacher' identity

- Concerned with classroom practice
- Concerned with being good teachers
- Value as teachers




# Definitions

**Research:** peer-reviewed; published in academic fora, e.g. journals

**Scholarship:** public but not necessarily peer-reviewed, e.g. conference presentations,

**Scholarly activity:** all activities including reading, attending conferences



Findings: importance  
of scholarly activity  
to EAP identity

# Research and academic identity

Scholarly activity strongly connected to identities constructed as:

- Academic master status
- Support service master status
- Effective teacher master status

# *We are academics*

- We are research active
- or
- Research not necessary for academic identity

I think there's a perception of that [that to be an academic you need to be a researcher]. I'm not sure how far I agree with that. At my university, for example, they've recently changed promotion routes so there's two options, a teaching route and a research route. I think that's very telling. I don't think the two parts are mutually exclusive; they're both important in being an academic for me [...] Lecturing is teaching. I don't see a lecturer role as a researcher; that's something else they do that either informs their teaching or furthers their academic career or whatever, but we're all doing the same thing. Even as EAP practitioners, it's informed by research, so we should have the same label

- Rebecca

**We are *not* academics**

EAP knowledge/scholarship is different

We don't impart lots of knowledge; we're not digging into any profound truths [...] EAP is very target orientated [...] We are teaching skills, and these skills are related to HE. These are necessary to be able to study successfully; that's the point of it [...] but I don't think it puts us on a par with somebody who does research into psychology or physics. We're just not on that level at all...so I think we're still at the bottom of the heap

- Graham

# Importance of scholarly activity for practice – effective teacher identity

- Positioning of EAP as practical or pragmatic in nature (Benesch, 2001; Pennycook, 1997)
- Participants tended to be engaged in scholarship or scholarly activity that informs classroom practice



The research we do is applied. Most of the research I've done has had practical objectives, trying to deal with problems that I've had

- Dave

I see a clear role for pure EAP academics, so I'm quite happy with the concept of someone who is researching EAP and is perhaps not classroom active, though I think probably research is somewhat informed if you have some classroom time

- Pete

# Doctoral study

Effective teacher identity - PhD study valuable but doubts about its value for classroom practice

Yes, I can't see anyone saying no, there isn't a place for it, but I can't personally see what doing a PhD would actually change to my day-to-day job and approach overall. Yes, of course I might learn more about, let's say assessment [...] but then that's not necessarily going to affect my teaching of essay topics or something

- Paul

Even if you think it's divorced from what we do, why would you argue against having more...no, let's lower standards! [...]  
Even the argument about making it pragmatic is flawed because you're going to be teaching students who are going to be doing the same thing, the same process. I think the knowledge of that...I think we all accept that someone who has learned another language is a better English teacher. Why would you not want that transfer of skills?

- Beth

# Barriers to scholarship

- Teaching-only contracts that don't allow time for scholarly activity
- Lack of funding for professional development, or only for presenters at conferences
- Lack of encouragement or support from managers

# A way forward: challenging traditional forms of knowledge

- Several authors (e.g. Bell, 2016; Ding and Bruce, 2017; Hyland, 2012) have argued that EAP practitioners need to engage more in traditional forms of research
- Ding and Bruce (2017): EAP practitioners need to publish more in order to professionalise the field and to increase their cultural capital

# Three problems:

- Imposing academic identity on those who don't position themselves in this way
- Numerous barriers to engaging in scholarship
- Questions about the types of knowledge that are valued within the academy – should we be challenging these?

It's a bit of a kick in the teeth, I think, when you've got your PhD, or you are research active; you might not be publishing, but you might be writing blogs or attending or presenting at conferences, but you're not recognised outside of that within the university

- Kim

There's no reason why teachers shouldn't go out and do research, even if it's action research. Don't let this knowledge come from on high and shower down on you

- Mike



I also think that there's this kind of hierarchical...more like rungs if you like, of theory and practice, and that practice has to be underpinned by theory, and that there's feed *down*, that people who do research pass that research on to the practitioners. I'm a bit more...I like the other way as well. I went to a talk about how this should be a symbiotic relationship, where people in the practice are feeding *up* their experiences, as well as people doing theoretical research feeding down, more a kind of exchange

- Kim

# Subversive negotiations of face (Moore, 2017)

- actions or discursive acts that “*denaturalize taken-for-granted identity categories*” (Moore, 2017:263)
- Kim and Mike appear to be challenging the researcher identity that is taken for granted in the academy

# A way forward?

- EAP's marginalised status and fragmented identity make it difficult to exert this kind of influence
- Moore (2017): this form of subversion involves small reworkings of identity rather than revolutionary acts
- Emphasis on practitioner-based research not new, e.g. Stenhouse (1981): teachers should be central to research
- Changes in HE e.g. greater focus on teaching may open a path for more practitioner-based research
- Possibility for EAP practitioners to further professionalise the field by asserting a different form of academic identity?

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**Any questions?**

