ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The struggle for pedagogical recognition in higher education: short stories of tension and triumph in the professional identity construction of an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioner in Hong Kong

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Abstract

A considerable body of work now exists on the role that identity plays in understanding teachers and teaching. Developing and sustaining teacher identities in higher education can, however, be challenging given the subordinate positioning of teaching in some educational contexts. Despite the growth of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programmes in many parts of the world, recent research suggests that EAP practitioners are especially vulnerable to being assigned marginalized identities within the academy. Therefore, this paper reports the results of a study which used a short story approach to investigate the tensions and triumphs one EAP practitioner in Hong Kong experienced in constructing her language teacher identities (LTIs). Findings suggest that her identity tensions and struggles take place across space and time and play out at different scales, including classrooms, educational institutions, and within broader societal discourses. However, the short stories presented in this paper speak not only of tension and struggle, but also of determination and resilience to construct LTIs in the academy. Consequently, the results of this study can help to raise awareness amongst stakeholders, including policy makers, leaders of higher education institutions, and language teaching practitioners, of how they can support and sustain the construction of LTIs within the academy. Implications for professional learning for language teaching practitioners and suggestions for future research are considered.

Keywords English for Academic Purposes (EAP) · Language teacher identity · Narrative inquiry · Hong Kong

1 Vignette

In summer 2019, Carol (all names in this paper are pseudonyms) had been employed as a teacher of English as a second language at various secondary schools in Hong Kong for 15 years. In September of that year, she commenced employment as a

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fulltime English of Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioner at Hong Kong's River-view University. Together with Carol, two other EAP practitioners were also newly employed at Riverview that September. However, at the end of the 2019–2020 academic year, only Carol remained employed at Riverview. This paper is the story of her struggle and determination to construct an identity as an EAP practitioner.

This paper is about the tensions and struggles Carol encountered in constructing her teacher identities at one higher education institution in Hong Kong. It is also about her resilience in the face of these struggles and her determination to pursue her identity goals. What this identity refers to, in the words of Reeves (2018), "is the practice of becoming and being a teacher" (p. 4). Becoming and being a teacher occurs as identities are constructed and reconstructed, as people claim, are assigned, contest, and reject identities. A person's identity work then refers to this continual self-positioning and positioning by others.

Teacher identities matter because they are related to teacher and teaching quality: "being a good teacher means being aware of who we are and how this relates to what we do" (Barkhuizen & Mendieta, 2020, p. 11). However, establishing, developing, and sustaining teacher identities in higher education institutions can be challenging. Van Lankveld et al. (2017) argue that "developing a teacher identity in the university context is not a smooth process, and the outcome is uncertain" (p. 333). Some recent research suggests that such identity uncertainty is particularly prevalent amongst language educators at many higher education institutions around the globe (Bell, 2021; Ding & Bruce, 2017; Hyland, 2018). Fuelled partly by the growth in international student mobility (Murray, 2016), English for Academic Purposes (EAP)—which is "concerned with preparing students to undertake university study, conduct research, or teach in English-medium contexts" (Ding & Bruce, 2017, p. 1)—now represents a crucial component of the higher education landscape in many countries. Yet paradoxically, "many English language teachers in higher education instead see themselves as the poor relations when compared to academics from other disciplines" (Bell, 2021, p. 1). Bell (2021) ascribes this outcome to the frequent lack of doctoral-level qualifications amongst EAP practitioners as well as to their limited involvement in research activities compared to those in other academic departments. The net result is that EAP is assigned "a significantly lower academic status" (Bell, 2021, p. 9).

Mounting pressure on academics globally to undertake high-quality research has resulted in some facing identity tensions between that of "teacher" and of "researcher" (Yang et al., 2022). EAP practitioners are not immune to such tensions. Ding and Bruce (2017), for instance, speak of the often "ambivalent status" and "uncertain identity" of the EAP practitioner within the contemporary academy. Ambivalence and uncertainty arise from the presence of two different approaches to the positioning of EAP: as a support service or as an academic field. These conceptualizations can be a source of identity tension for EAP practitioners. As a support service, EAP practitioners can be assigned identities such as skilled technicians. As an academic field, these same practitioners may be seen as engaging with theory, undertaking research, and connecting both to pedagogy. EAP practitioners have also been depicted as "impoverished" for possessing a poor understanding of their roles within the academy and facing limited career prospects (Ding & Campion, 2016). EAP practitioners have been also labelled "outsiders", accused of lacking the expertise and knowledge to teach disciplinary discourse, with EAP assigned a "low-status service role" (Hyland, 2018, p. 386).

EAP practitioners have been urged to engage with research and scholarly activities as a means of addressing the challenges they face within the academy (Yan & Zhang, 2021). There can be, however, significant barriers to realizing such goals. Some EAP

practitioners report having limited time available to read and conduct research, believing that EAP research has little relevance to their teaching practices (Bahrami et al., 2019). Also, collaboration between subject instructors and EAP practitioners can be challenging (Alhassan et al., 2022). In the face of such challenges to the construction of EAP practitioner identities, calls for "the explicit appreciation of university teaching" (Van Lankveld et al., 2017, p. 334) and for enhanced understanding of EAP practitioners have emerged (Ding & Campion, 2016). In responding to these calls, the collection and analysis of data in the current study was guided by the question: *How did an EAP practitioner at one higher education institution in Hong Kong construct her LTIs?* The following section describes the conceptual framework used to understand this experience of EAP practitioner identity construction.

1.1 EAP and the Hong Kong context

The majority of the eight publicly funded universities in Hong Kong adopt English as the medium of instruction (MOI). Consequently, students need to acquire high levels of proficiency in written and spoken English. Many, however, enter undergraduate courses with little understanding of specialist academic genres and minimal experience in conducting the research and planning crucial to the production of academic texts. In their survey of undergraduate students at a Hong Kong university, Evans and Morrison (2011) found that many struggle with both academic writing—in particular style, grammar, and cohesion—and technical vocabulary. In addition, students reported difficulties in adequately mastering the key discourse practices of the disciplinary community they seek to join.

In response to this situation, all eight universities provide EAP subjects early in the undergraduate curriculum. The attention given to EAP at the tertiary level intensified following a shift from a three-year to a four-year undergraduate curriculum. For example, one university introduced two compulsory English subjects in its core curriculum with at least one being a general EAP course. Another university changed their two compulsory undergraduate courses from General English to EAP, while a third increased the total number of credits for English language subjects from 6 to 12, requiring that students begin with a general EAP course and in later years of study complete a course in English for specific academic purposes (Chen, 2019). However, Evans (2017) contends that because new cohorts of undergraduates experience a compressed and more general secondary education they may begin tertiary education with lower levels of academic knowledge, study skills, and proficiency in the English language compared to previous generations.

Despite the significance given to EAP, the use of English in Hong Kong's universities is subject to numerous competing pressures. As noted, most Hong Kong universities adopt English as the official MOI, reflecting the internationalization of higher education and the desire of these institutions to enhance their status in the global academic arena (Chen, 2019). Despite this, Evans (2017) points to forces suggesting that Chinese, both Cantonese and Putonghua, could play an increasingly significant role at the classroom level. These include the introduction of a "mother-tongue" MOI policy at the secondary school level; the recruitment of university staff and students from mainland China; the increasing use of Chinese in branches of the government; and recent community beliefs in falling standards of English language proficiency in Hong Kong.

1.2 Conceptual framework: the multifaceted nature of language teacher identity work

LTIs are cognitive and social, reflect struggle and harmony, are constructed and reconstructed, and are spatial and temporal (Barkhuizen, 2017). As cognitive, LTIs include "the beliefs, values, and commitments that allow a teacher to identify both as a teacher and as being a particular type of teacher" (Hsieh, 2010, p. 1). LTIs are also social. They are, as Block (2017) explains, "constructed via (or emerge from) interactions (both face-to-face and electronically mediated) with others: fellow teachers, supervisors, and any number of more distant stakeholders…" (p. 34). LTIs involve both struggle and harmony. Reeves (2018) points out that others "may endorse an individual's identity positions but may also exert pressure to alter or overturn such positions" (p. 1). Thus, while some language teacher identities (LTIs) are legitimated, others are rejected or marginalized.

LTIs are constructed and reconstructed. Interaction with others means that LTIs are negotiated and, therefore, ideological. This feature of LTIs is reflected in Zembylas and Chubbuck's (2018) proposed political approach, which argues that investigating relations of power is crucial to understanding LTIs, as well as Kubota's (2017) critical teacher identity which also problematizes unequal relations of power. LTIs are temporal and spatial. Echoing Reeves (2018), Schutz et al. (2018) speak of teacher identities in terms of fluidity, as a process of continually becoming over time. Toohey (2017) draws attention to the importance of examining the ecologies in which LTIs work takes place, including "how these environments come into being, what practices are enabled/constrained in these environments, (and) what resources are available" (p. 14). LTIs are constructed in community and institutional settings, as teachers' interaction with other teachers, learners, administrators, parents, and the wider community. Finally, understanding LTIs identity work requires recognition of the societal discourses and ideologies that exist in the socio-political contexts in which LTIs work occurs (Barkhuizen & Mendieta, 2020).

2 The study

2.1 Setting and participant

The setting for this study is Riverview University, located in an urban area of Hong Kong. Riverview is one of seven publicly funded universities which use English as the medium of instruction (EMI). In Hong Kong, undergraduate students report experiencing a considerable gap between the language skills they have acquired through their school-level education and the linguistic demands that studying in an EMI tertiary-level institution places upon them. Evidence suggests that these students need assistance with general academic writing and with acquiring the specific discourse practices of their chosen field (Morrison & Evans, 2018). Responding to this need, many tertiary institutions, requite year one undergraduate students to complete a general EAP course, with some institutions also mandating completion of a more specific "English in the Discipline" courses in later years (Hyland, 2017).

The participant in this research is Carol, a female ethnic Chinese who identifies Cantonese as her first language. Josselson and Hammack (2021) point out that in narrative research, it is essential to "recruit participants who have experiences that might illuminate the research question(s)" (p. 19). At the time of data collection, Carol's experiences were

consistent with this requirement. For example, she had been teaching English as a second or additional language for a total of approximately 15 years in several different secondary schools in Hong Kong. She holds an undergraduate degree in English studies, a Postgraduate Diploma in Education, and a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics, all acquired at one of Hong Kong's publicly funded universities. In the 2019–2020 academic year, Carol joined the Language Centre (LC) at Riverview for the first time in the designated role of fulltime language instructor and was assigned to teach several EAP courses throughout that academic year. As will be seen later in this paper, one of these EAP courses played a pivotal role in her LTI work. This course, which is compulsory for final year undergraduate students in the Faculty of Engineering, is one semester (12 weeks) in duration and credit-bearing. The intended learning outcomes include equipping students with academic, professional, and technical communication skills using the English language.

As mentioned in the vignette above, Carol was one of three language instructors hired at the commencement of the 2019–2020 academic year. Two of these three instructors tended their resignation from the LC at the end of that academic year. Given recent attention to language teacher attrition, including within Hong Kong (Trent, 2019), as well as the role of tension in teacher identity work highlighted in the theoretical framework underpinning this study, Carol was invited to participate in the study as it was thought that she could provide rich data on why and how some EAP practitioners are able to navigate through challenges and struggles while continuing their LTIs work. It should be noted, however, that "the aim of narrative research is not to generalize to a larger population but rather to examine meaning-making processes for individuals and group members" (Josselson & Hammack, 2021, p. 19). Therefore, this study makes no claim as to the generalizability of the findings reported here to the other two instructors who resigned from Riverview, to a larger population of EAP practitioners, or to other higher education institutions.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

To understand how Carol engaged in LTIs work at Riverview, a narrative approach guided the collection and analysis of data. Allowing Carol to reflect on experiences, events and encounters in narrative form was chosen because, as Kelchtermans (2018) notes, "teachers are storytellers…storytelling is the natural way through which people make sense of the events, situations, and encounters throughout their lives" (p. 237).

Data collection began in August 2020, following the granting of ethical approval from the institution in which data was collected. As a first step, narrative frames were used to collect data (Barkhuizen, 2014). This frame consisted of incomplete sentences and blank spaces that provided a template for participants to produce a written story based on their own experiences and reflections. In addition to collecting background biographical information, the frame required Carol to consider her experience as an EAP practitioner at Riverside. In particular, she was asked to describe and reflect upon events or encounters that she considered challenging, to describe any successes or failures she believes she experienced as an instruction, to share situations in which she had attempted to overcome these professional challenges and, finally, to imagine her future trajectory as an EAP practitioner. For example, the frame asked Carol to complete sentences such as: "When I first started teaching EAP a problem I had was……"; "I tried to address this problem by…"; Now, my teaching is…"; "A challenge I continue to face is…".

After the narrative frame was completed and returned to me, the next phase of data collection took the form of a semi-structured interview of approximately one hour in duration

in which Carol was asked to further elaborate on several of the experiences she described in the narrative frame. In doing so, a narrative approach to interviewing was adopted, in which the interviewer invites stories as opposed to generalizations (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). As an illustration, in the narrative frame Carol mentioned a meeting she attended with members of the Engineering Faculty at Riverview and during the interview she was questions such as asked: "can you tell me about your experience of meeting with members of the Faculty of Education?". The structuring of questions in this way allowed Carol to reflect upon her experiences and perceptions in a storied form, involving characters, times, and places. In addition, in narrative research attention should be given to the relationship between the interviewer/analysist and the participant "because it inevitably shapes the form and content of personal narratives and their analysis" (Maynes et al., 2008, p. 99). Prior to commencement of the study, Carol was known to me in my capacity as a language teacher educator in Hong Kong. This positionality facilitated access to the data needed to answer the research question mentioned above, contributed to the building of rapport between Carol and myself, and provided me with a degree of insider knowledge of the challenges faced by language teachers in the territory. At the same time, as a teacher educator, the teaching of EAP to undergraduate students was "culturally strange" (Maynes, et al., 2008, p. 100) to me. My curiosity to understand Carol's experiences as a front-line EAP practitioner led to the collection of rich data as I continuously sought a deeper understanding of her experiences, some of which are reported in this paper.

The term "short stories" (Barkhuizen, 2016) describes data excerpts, taken from larger data sets, which "narrate experiences, from the past or the imagined future, and include reflective or evaluative commentary" (p. 660). In addition, as Barkhuizen (2016) illustrates in the case of one preservice English language teacher in New Zealand, this storytelling includes the performance of identities. Three short stories are presented in this paper. The first two stories ("*Floating above the classroom"* and "*Meeting the faculty"*) were selected as they illustrate the challenges Carol initially experienced in taking on the identity "EAP instructor" at Riverview. The third story ("*A visit from the department head"*) is included here as it speaks to some of the ways in which she attempted to confront and overcome these challenges in the name of her ongoing LTIs work. Taken together, these stories present a coherent account (Barkhuizen, 2014) of Carol's LTIs construction trajectory at Riverside during her first academic year as an EAP instructor. It does this by beginning with an exploration of the identity tensions she confronted in the initial months of that year, then moves to consider some of the ways in which she subsequently addressed those tensions and how these experiences impact on her imagined future LTIs construction.

Data analysis focused on both content and context (Barkhuizen, 2016). Content analysis addressed three interrelated dimensions. The first relates to "who": who are the characters in the story, including their relationships and their positioning relative to each other. Analysis of content also considers the issue of "where": what places are involved in the story. Finally, the issue of "when" draws attention to the time frames involved in the story; past, present, and future. Turning to context, analysis followed Barkhuizen's (2016) encouragement of analysts to look beyond the immediate context of the story by considering three interconnected levels of story. The first level, "story", focuses on the personal; the inner thoughts and emotions of participants as well as their interaction with others in their immediate contexts, such as classrooms. The second level, "Story", explores participants' interaction with institutional members beyond these immediate contexts, as well as with institutional policies and practices**.** Finally, at the scale of "STORY", data analysis considers the ways in which speakers call up more distant systems of meaning embedded within socio-political contexts and that manifest as wider cultural and professional discourses.

In terms of teaching and learning, this scale could include national language curriculums and discourses that shape educational agendas. During data collection and analysis, I frequently sought Carol's feedback on my evolving understanding of her LTIs work, in a form of member-checking.

2.3 Findings

2.3.1 Short story 1: floating above the lesson

In this opening short story, Carol reflects on one of her EAP classes with engineering students at Riverside University. She initially discusses certain practices and activities which she associates with the identity "teacher" and "student". The usefulness of these practices and activities is subsequently contested by the students.

1. There was this moment, in one of my classes,
2. it was all quite surreal,
3. it was like I was above, floating above the classroom, looking in
4. and I could see that I was teaching, yet I wasn't really teaching.
5. I mean, yes, I was being a regular, traditional type of teacher,
6. telling them (students) what to do, explaining something about academic writing, distributing material,
7. the usual stuff, nothing strange,
8. like what I did when I was teaching in schools
9. and same as teachers did when I was a student,
10. but then all I could see was blank (student) faces,
11. I wasn't getting through to them,
12. some were distracted, on their (mobile) phones,
13. which the (university) policy says they're not supposed to use without teacher permission.
14. and then I asked one student: "what's going on, tell me, I don't understand"
15. and he told me "we don't need this course,
16. in our engineering classes the engineering lecturers they don't grade us on language, only content".
17. and then another student said something like, "engineers in the real world need math more than English".
18. well, I was shocked
19. I was like eliminated,
20. as someone of no use to them
21. it left me feeling inadequate as their teacher
22. and I thought, I'm just one teacher
23. I can't do anything to change that thinking; I mean, what goes on in the Engineering faculty
24. but then right away I felt that I must be the one to change, and this situation in my classroom must change,
25. so I have to be a better teacher than this,
26. to better reach and connect with my students
27. so I won't give up!

2.4 Who

Carol and a group of undergraduate engineering students are the key actors in short story (story). Their relationship is presented in a way that we might expect of typical or traditional teacher–student relations across the world. Indeed, Carol self-identifies herself as a "regular teacher". Carol also engages in practices and activities, and implicitly endorses particular social discourses, that she associates with the identity "teacher" (STORY). She positions herself, for instance, as a teller and as an explainer of knowledge, as well as a distributor of learning materials. This identity work seeks to establish particular relations of power that Carol considers typical of teacher student relations: teachers are positioned as providers of cognitive and physical resources and students as acceptors of these resources.

Yet, this identity work is not without disruption. The teacher–student relationships Carol regards as "typical" are contested by these students (story). Their faces are blank. They are using mobile phones, a classroom practice not endorsed by Riverview University (Story). Carol therefore positions students as rejectors of the information she seeks to provide to them. Being "distracted" in her classroom, students undermine the construction of her preferred teacher identity. As Carol puts it, "I wasn't getting through to them.

In an interesting challenge to Carol's understanding of desirable student–teacher interaction and the relations of power underpinning them, she invites the students to position themselves as providers of information: "I asked what's going on". In fact, in this move she identifies herself as having less information or knowledge than her student when she concedes "I don't understand". Students then take on the new identity of providers of information, willingly reversing traditional power relations between teachers and students. Indeed, they do so in the starkest possible terms, declaring, as one student put it, "we don't' need this".

In taking on these identity positions, the students introduce two other characters to the story: Engineering faculty members and, in the broader community, professional engineers (Story). Their role is to serve as authority for the student's new identities as providers, as opposed to receivers, of information and knowledge. The information students subsequently provide to Carol invokes both characters for authority because they refer to societal discourses (STORY) that position both university instructors of Engineering and professional practitioners of engineering as not valuing language skills as highly as mathematical competence. By invoking these discourses Carol's own identity as a language teacher is contested. Indeed, she goes on to position herself as an inadequate teacher, who is now in need of change. Here, we witness in the starkest possible terms Carol's identity tension. On the one hand, stands her desired self-positioning as a "regular" teacher, with the concomitant relations of power between herself and students that this LTI implies. On the other hand, and in sharp contrast to this preferred LTI, she is forced to confront being positioned in ways she considers undesirable by her students. She does, nevertheless, envisage a resolution to this tension by imagining herself as becoming a better teacher.

2.5 Where

The immediate setting in which this short story unfolds is the EAP classroom, a space Carol claims as her own: "in one of *my* classes" (stories). At the same time, when she refers to "traditional" and "regular", she is shifting between scales to draw upon images of similar classrooms, and classroom relations, writ large (STORIES). However, again shifting back in scale (stories), the most significant space in terms of Carol's teacher identity

exploration is her creation of a personal imaginary place, above the classroom, in which she is able to observe, figuratively, the enactment of her teacher identity.

The introduction of two additional spaces by the students plays a crucial role in this short story as they underpin Carol's identity tension: these spaces being the engineering classrooms at Riverside and, further afield, the professional work spaces populated by practicing engineers (Stories). In both spaces Carol's identity as a valued teacher is erased ("I was like eliminated"). Rather, as seen above, she is assigned a deficit-orientated identity in these spaces: "as someone of no use to them". Another consequence of the introduction of these spaces, and corresponding negative implications for her LTI work, is that Carol's students foreground places in which she believes she lacks agency: "I can't do anything to change that thinking…in the Engineering Faculty".

To address these perceived limits to agency, this short story again shifts spaces, and scales, as Carol returns to a place in which she believes she does have agency to construct, and reconstruct, her teacher identity: her own EAP classroom (story). Although at this point in the short story, she is speaking of an imagined future classroom, she is nevertheless confident that this is indeed a space in which she will be able to exercise agency, in ways that are for now unspecified, and to continue to construct her emerging identity as an improved teacher.

2.6 When

In one respect, and at one scale, this is a short story of the construction and reconstruction of LTIs set in the very recent past, as the teacher provides an account of a lesson she taught not long ago (story). In the opening remarks, we see the teacher identity Carol wishes to construct. As noted above, her self-positioning takes the form of what she terms a "regular, traditional type" of teacher.

This teacher identity is not, however, constructed entirely in the here and now. Rather, as she seeks to construct her LTIs, Carol is also moving somewhat further back in time. Thus, her story shifts to a different scale (Story) as she draws upon her own recently lived experience as both a language teacher and as a language learner in Hong Kong to endorse her preferred LTIs. Moving to a larger scale again, it could be suggested that the authority for constructing the type of teacher identity she desires is also grounded in the distant past. In fact, Carol's construction of the identity she labels "traditional" and "regular" teacher invokes a discourse of teachers and teaching that might well be recognizable to language teachers and students from many decades ago (STORY).

Despite using the authority inherent in a long history of particular types of teacher–student relations in the construction of her LTIs, we have seen that the present is a time of identity struggle for Carol. However, the possibility of a resolution to this struggle is very real. Specifically, it takes the form of her once again introducing an element of time into this short story, as she looks to a moment when she will be able to identify herself as a "better teacher". This glance towards her desired future LTI is underpinned by an adamant declaration: "I must change, this situation must change". In this instant in time, Carol demonstrates that an essential part of her professional identity is that of agentive teacher.

2.6.1 Short story 2: meeting the faculty

It was argued above that EAP practitioners can be assigned marginalized and subordinate identities within the academy. In short story two, Carol recalls an event in which she, along

with several colleagues from the Language Centre, experienced being positioned in this way by others.

1. There was a meeting at the start of one semester
2. where I and some other (language) teachers went across to the Engineering faculty
3. and we were sitting around this big table with some academics from the faculty,
4. and they were sort of sitting at the top of the table, away from us a bit,
5. we were sort put in a corner.
6. so the meeting, it was about planning our (EAP) courses
7. and they (the faculty members) seemed like we were invading their space
8. and before the meeting started they were just speaking amongst themselves,
9. far away from us
10. so we weren't involved at all.
11. Then suddenly one of them (from the faculty) said "let's start"
12. so we started to give some suggestions for the EAP courses
13. then they seemed to almost immediately interrupt us, talk over us,
14. saying that "just do what you always do in the past, that's good enough".
15. that was their attitude the whole meeting, sort of "don't disturb us with language stuff".
16. and soon after they just left,
17. it was a very quick meeting,
18. as if there was something more important they have to do,
19. they just went back to their offices, to do more research, I suppose,
20. as if being there (in their office) was more important than being with us.
21. very frustrating.

2.7 Who

The participants (story) in "Meeting the faculty"—Carol, other staff from the LC, and members of the Faculty of Engineering—are representing different academic and teaching units of Riverview (Story), a fact that has implications for their identity positioning within the meeting. For example, members of the Engineering Faculty assume the right to tell members of the Language Centre what should be taught within the EAP course. This assumption, illustrated by Carol's observation that she and her LC colleagues were told by faculty members to "just do what you always do", underscores the implicit subordinate positioning of EAP practitioners. These unequal relations of power are further exemplified in the identification of herself and other LC members as "teachers", as opposed to members of the Engineering Faculty who are named as "academics", identifications that invoke discourses which assign a higher status to the latter, not only at Riverview but also within many higher education institutions (STORY).

The marginalized identity assigned to LC staff is also underscored by the different practices of the participants. For example, Carol and her colleagues offer only "suggestions" to the Engineering Faculty, which the latter appear to ultimately reject ("they seemed to interrupt us"), or at the very least downplay in importance ("don't disturb us with language stuff"). As the meeting unfolds, LC staff appear unable or unwilling to contest the relations of power that underpin such practices, a silence which could be seen as implicit acquiesce to and reinforcement of their marginalized position within the academy. Finally, in a unilateral move, members of the Engineering Faculty abruptly draw the meeting to a close, further underscoring their dominant position relative to the EAP practitioners.

2.8 Where

The setting for this short story is a meeting room on the campus of Riverview University (story). Significantly for the positioning of the characters in this story, this room is located within the faculty of engineering and it is the LC staff that are required to enter this space ("teachers went over to the Engineering faculty…we were invading their space…"). Space within the meeting room itself, specifically the rigid division of space, plays a essential part in supporting and sustaining the identities claimed and assigned to the participants in this story. Carol's description of "a big table" is revealing in terms of this identity development. In occupying the space at the top of this table, members of the Engineering faculty implicitly claim a dominant position in relation to LC staff, underscoring an identity hierarchy within this university (Story). The physical distance that is maintained throughout the meeting between engineering faculty and those from the LC, which appears to set up an "us and them" dichotomy between the two groups of participants, further reinforces the relations of power underlying these identity divisions. This division of space, for example, caused LC members to be excluded from participating in the pre-meeting discussion, which was dominated entirely by participants from the Engineering Faculty.

The final reference to space in this short story sees members of the Engineering Faculty departing the meeting room, presumably, Carol surmises, to "do more research". This reference to research invokes a discourse of the modern academy in which research is prioritized over teaching (STORY), thus reinforcing the marginalized identities assigned to those from the teaching-focused LC.

2.9 When

The meeting Carol recalls took place over a relatively short time frame, having a duration of no more than 20 min. Yet, by considering much shorter periods of time within the meeting much can be understood about the identities being claim by, and assigned to, different participants. For example, the time at which the meeting formally began was claimed entirely by members of the Engineering Faculty: "… suddenly one of them (from the faculty) said "let's start". A similar claim to ownership of time, and turns, within the meeting is evident in Carol's recollection of being "almost immediately" interrupted. It is, in addition, Engineering faculty members who dictate the time at which the meeting ends ("and soon after they just left"). By claiming and dominating each of these individual moments in time (story), one group of participants, in this case those associated with the Engineering Faculty, assign to Carol and her colleagues marginalized and subordinate identities that reflect power relations which are long standing within the academy (STORY).

2.10 Short story 3: a visit from the department head

Van Lankveld et al. (2017) argue that contact across academic departments can be one means of creating community and empowering university teachers. Indeed, carol employed such a strategy to construct and reconstruct her preferred LTIs at Riverview. She invited senior members of the Engineering faculty, as well as people in private industry and government departments in Hong Kong who had successful achieved the identity "engineer",

into her classroom to speak to her EAP students. In short story three we see how one such invitation was crucial to her ongoing identity work.

1. I was totally frustrated with the situation (with EAP students),
2. I felt really shameful that I couldn't be a better teacher for them
3. but I definitely wasn't going to give up.
4. So, one of things I tried
5. to change the situation in class was inviting in engineers.
6. One time, I invited the department head (of engineering), Professor Chan
7. to come to the classroom and give a talk to the students
8. and this gave the students a chance to hear about
9. how important language is for engineers.
10. So, he (department head) came and shared his own journey from years before,
11. as someone who was once just like them today,
12. who had limited language skills and struggled,
13. but later moved up in the world, professionally,
14. and he said how important learning how to communicate is
15. not only now, academically,
16. but also, to be formally admitted and recognized as professional engineers
17. in Hong Kong or around the world.
18. So, the idea I had with the invitation was to show students that they can do it too
19. and in terms of what we (the language centre) teach,
20. it's really important to have this knowledge, as an engineer.
21. So, I think taking initiatives like this can benefit me as an EAP teacher while I'm working here (at Riverside)
22. or even if I'm working somewhere else, another university maybe

2.11 Who

Carol and her students are amongst the participants in this short story. Initially, the scale of the story is intimate (story) as Carol reveals some of the emotional struggles, including frustration and shame, she has been experiencing in her LTIs work. Yet Carol is resolute in her determination to continue this identity work, to position herself as a "better teacher". She also presents herself as an agentive teacher. She clearly rejects the LTIs ascribed to her by some EAP students and faculty members at Riverview. She explores the possibility of changing the way in which she is positioned by these others by inviting the head of the Engineering Department at Riverview to speak to this group of EAP students. For the remainder of this story, however, she plays a relatively minor role, entering explicitly again only at the conclusion Nevertheless, as the story unfolds the renegotiation of relations between her and the students that occurs has significant implications for the ongoing construction of her own LTIs (story).

This identity renegotiation is made possible through the introduction of another character, namely the head of the Engineering Department, Professor Chan, who did not attend the meeting described in short story two, above. It is Professor Chan's personal journey of struggle (story) to construct his current identities, including that of academic, administrator, and engineer, which dominates the resetting of relations between Carol and these students. Most significantly for Carol's LTIs work is the revelation that language was at the heart of Professor's Chan's journey. His demonstration of overcoming linguistic challenges,

and the subsequent positioning of students as capable of similar feats and hence professional identity success, is central to the renegotiation of relations between Carol and her students. It is, at the conclusion of this short story, the importance attached to language skills in the emergence of an engineer's professional identity which allows Carol to position herself, and potentially be positioned by her students, as someone who possess and provides valuable linguistic capital.

2.12 When

This short story is illustrative of the way in which Carol is able to marshal resources from both the past and the imagined future in the service of contemporary identity work. This is identity construction—both past and future—that has immediate implications for this teacher and her students. Turning to the past, Professor Chan provides a personal recollection of his prior individual identity struggles which, as noted above, are grounded in issues of language mastery. This recollection moves back and forth in time. First, Professor Chan takes this group of students back from the here and now to his lived past. Significantly for Carol's own identity work, Professor Chan then moves back to the here and now by connecting his prior identity construction challenges to the identity construction work Carol's students are now embarking upon.

Emphasizing the different time frames that this short story invokes, Professor Chan is also essentially looking to the student's future. His identity construction successes take these students on a temporal journey that speaks to their own future imagined identities beyond Riverside (Stories). In this linkage between contemporary and future identity construction, the students are forced to recognize that overcoming the linguistic challenges that now confront them will be crucial if they, like Professor Chan, are to realize their desired future professional identities.

This movement between past, current, and future therefore plays a critical role in the student's identity construction. It highlights, for instance, the discrepancy between their contemporary and desired future identities. In addition, it provides a roadmap for how they might bridge the temporal gap between the two identities and, most significantly, embeds linguistics skills within this journey. At the same time, these movements across time reconstruct Carol's own immediate identity in the EAP classroom (story) from one of marginalization to that of crucial facilitator of her student's professional identity construction. This also empowers Carol to look to her own future. She is now able to envisage construction of desired LTIs in both her immediate future ("while I'm working here") (story) and across intermediate time frames ("even if I'm working somewhere else") (Story). Finally, this repositioning of Carol and her EAP course in the eyes of students also begins to undermine the strength of a potentially long-standing societal discourses (STORY) that was invoked by Carol's students and discussed in short story one, and which regards the acquisition of linguistic skills as subordinate to that of content subject knowledge in achieving the identity "engineer".

2.13 Where

The locations in this story move between three scales. This short story takes place in the EAP classroom (story). As we saw in short story one, this is a space that is marginalized by students, as being one of limited value to their professional identity construction goals. Yet, this positioning is challenged by the introduction of spaces of learning and identity work

beyond those of Riverside (Story). This spatial movement takes students to the academic spaces of another university, one in which Professor Chan, as an undergraduate, struggled to construct his professional identity. His success in meeting and overcoming these challenges to claim the identity "academic" returns the short story to Riverside (Story). Finally, this short story implicates identity construction that occurs in spaces well beyond this institution, in places populated by professional engineers in Hong Kong and indeed across the globe (STORY). Embedded within this reference is an unambiguous message concerning identity construction for this group of contemporary EAP students: if they too wish to gain access to these spaces, and thereby take on the identity "engineer", then they must also confront and overcome similar linguistic hurdles.

3 Discussion

The theoretical framework discussed above suggests that struggle and tension are inherent components of the construction of LTIs. Carol's stories of becoming and being an EAP practitioner suggests her identity struggles and tensions occur partly in the EAP classroom, challenging the LTIs she seeks to take on, and impacting several of the facets of LTIs mentioned earlier in this paper. For example, she self-positions herself as a useful EAP teacher, a role she reifies in practice using learning materials and activities. Illustrating the proposition that LTIs construction takes partly in institutional and community contexts, this self-positioning comes into tension with her positioning by others: some students position this teacher, her pedagogical practices and activities, as superfluous to the construction of their imagined future professional identities as engineers. These identity struggles and tensions challenge, in turn, other aspects of this teacher's LTIs construction. Contestation of the theories and beliefs she holds about teaching and learning EAP by some students forces her to reflect on her beliefs about her competency as an EAP teacher; she asks, for instance, "am I good enough?". This self-reflection extends to her moral perspectives as an EAP teacher as she questions whether she is, in her words, "doing the best" for her students.

Beyond the EAP classroom, this teacher's LTIs construction takes place in the academic community of Riverview. The positioning of EAP, and thereby EAP teachers, in this institutional setting is also a source of her identities tension and struggle. The claims she and other teachers make for the positioning of EAP, its teachers, and their pedagogical contributions as a valued part of the academy are firmly rebuffed by members of the Engineering Faculty, who assign language teachers subordinate roles to those of academic community members.

Yet Carol's LTIs construction journey does not end with this positioning by relatively powerful others within the academy. While the need to empower EAP teachers in the academy has long been advocated (Bell, 2021; Ding & Campion, 2016), Carol's stories demonstrate one way this could be operationalized. First, it should be recalled that in this study LTIs are conceptualized as constructed and reconstructed, as well as spatial and temporal: at different times and in different places they are accepted, contested, resisted, and sometimes rejected. Despite being assigned the marginal and subordinate identities discussed above, this EAP teacher exercises agency with the aim of resisting and ultimately rejecting such identifications.

Introducing characters such as Professor Chan into her LTIs construction is therefore an attempt by Carol to use time–space dimensions to construct, and in this case reconstruct, her LTIs. She contests the beliefs of her students about the role of language in

their professional identity construction by having Professor Chan transport them back through time and space to the classrooms of his youth, to explore how his linguistic struggles played a central role in his acquiring identities such as "academic" and "professional engineer". At this moment in time, the students are challenged to reconsider the role of language in the construction of their own imagined future professional identities as engineers in spaces such as private organisations, universities, and government departments within Hong Kong and beyond. These spatial and temporal movements have implications for Carol's contemporary LTIs construction efforts as she seeks to challenge and overturn her deficit-orientated positioning by one group of EAP engineering students and to re-establish her preferred LTIs in the EAP classroom.

This EAP teacher's narratives also operationalize the theoretical proposition that LTIs are constructed and reconstructed in ideological contexts. The teacher's narratives reveal a struggle in which the construction of EAP as useless, and EAP teachers as subordinate to academics from faculties such as Engineering, is resisted by two different meanings of EAP and its teachers: EAP as useful and EAP as a legitimate part of the academy. First, Carol constructed EAP as useful at the classroom level by reifying in practice her conviction that linguistic skills are an essential component of the identity engineer, in both academia and professional practice. This meaning of EAP underpinned her desire to identify students, and they to self-identify, as simultaneously EAP students and engineering students. Moreover, she established a semiotic relationship between these two identities: it is only through mastery of linguistic skills that these students can legitimately claim for themselves, and be assigned by others, the future imagined identity of engineer.

A possible interpretation of the role of Professor Chan and the professional authority he embodies in Carol's LTIs work is that of perpetuating the subordinate positioning of EAP practitioners within the academy. The implied need for external validation of the value of the teaching and learning practices she offers engineering students could be seen as exemplifying power imbalances that valorise academic over teaching staff. Carol, however, did not accept this interpretation. Rather, the introduction of this character into her LTIs construction story is, for her, a means of positioning EAP as a legitimate part of the academy by reducing boundaries between language teachers and academic faculty. She reduced physical and material boundaries by inviting Professor Chan into one of her own spaces of LTIs work; the EAP classroom. Cognitively, this EAP teacher reduced boundaries by positioning Professor Chan and the EAP students as undertaking a similar linguistic journey towards attaining the identity engineer. In other words, she positioned language learning as an essential temporal and spatial experience of personal and professional identities construction that stretches over extended periods of time and traverse diverse spaces in academic and professional contexts along the way to becoming and being an engineer.

Finally, as the theoretical framework used in this study implies, emotions are a crucial component of Carol's LTIs work. Her emotional journey in the service of the construction of her desired LTIs can be charted across space and time. Her narratives, at various times and in different spaces, reveal emotions such as shock and frustration when tensions arise between her desired LTIs and those made available to her by some others. Nevertheless, she explicitly rejects those emotions that she regards as not supportive of her LTIs work, such as being bothered by the identity tensions she experiences. Rather, her determination to move beyond such emotions in the name of forging her preferred LTIs is illustrated by her agentive efforts to contest the marginalized and subordinate identities ascribed to her by some others.

3.1 Addressing tensions in EAP teacher identity construction

Hyland and Shaw (2016) maintain that "traditional academic discourse and the structures it represents are strong, and discourse-analytic or EAP voices are weak" (p. 6). Nevertheless, despite beginning from an apparent position of weakness within the academy, Carol was able to marshal both pedagogical resources and the will—from within as well as beyond herself, the EAP classroom, Riverview, and indeed Hong Kong—in the service of her LTIs work. What implications, then, does Carols's experiences have for stakeholders, such as university leaders and academic faculty, who wish to support the identities construction efforts of teaching-focused staff such as Carol?

As noted earlier in this paper, recognition of the contributions of teaching-focused staff is crucial to their sense of value and performance (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Raun & Fox, 2018; Sell, 2023). The results reported in this paper have implications for the design of activities that foster the recognition of teaching-focused staff by support the construction of the professional identities within the university. A narrative approach, such as the one discussed in this paper, has much to offer in this regard. As the short stories discussed in this paper illustrate, Carol has begun the journey of reimagining and reconstructing her LTIs as an "EAP practitioner". Sharing stories of similar successful, resolute EAP practitioner identity work with other EAP practitioners could be one way of fostering and promoting this knowledge-building by admitting the possibility of alternative narratives to those of the dominant discourses of the academy which privilege "academics" over "teachers" and research over engagement in pedagogy.

Narratives hold potential for exposing, contesting, and possibly rejecting the marginalized positioning of EAP teachers within the higher education institutions such as Riverview. This is because stories frequently introduce numerous participants, each one potentially holding different and even possibly competing worldviews. For instance, the narratives told by the EAP teacher in this study introduces characters such as Professor Chan. His stories of linguistic struggle and ultimate success afford EAP teachers recognition by underscoring their contributions to his professional accomplishments, thus encouraging students and other stakeholders to re-examine the marginalized positioning of EAP and its teachers in the academy. Narratives also often describe a disruption of some kind, an event that deviates from normalized or expected behaviour or occurrences. An example is Carol's agentive decision to invite senior members of the Faculty of Engineering into her EAP classroom. This created a space in which it is now possible to conceive of a different reality to that which marginalizes EAP teachers and their pedagogy, one that acknowledges the contribution of EAP teachers such as Carol. This disruption, then, opens, the possibility for EAP teachers to be positioned as valuable members of the academy.

Practically, university leaders can make use of such narratives to support the identity construction aims of EAP practitioners in higher education. Building grassroots communities could be one means of integrating teaching-focused staff into the mainstream culture of a university. Higher education institutions might conduct workshops in which EAP teachers like Carol meet with other stakeholders, such as academic staff, university leaders and administrators, and students, to identify dominant societal and academic discourses (STORY) and reflect on how they impact their institutional relationships (Story) and individual classroom practices (story). Conducted as one part of practitioner's professional learning (Trent, 2011), the telling of stories could be fruitful for all stakeholders in higher education, who, during such sharing, have opportunities to

contribute their own stories of pedagogical practices and teaching experiences to create potentially empowering resonance. For instance, disseminating stories and advice from EAP practitioners who have successfully constructed their desired professional identities could provide options other than exiting the teaching profession to those confronting the type of identity tensions and struggles described in the stories presented in this paper. Finally, by sharing their stories, practitioners such as Carol can serve as role models and mentors who provide support and networking opportunities to other EAP practitioners.

4 Conclusion

This paper has argued that tension and struggle are inevitable parts of the identity work of language teaching practitioners in higher education. These tensions can, however, be a source of teacher attrition. Yet Carol's experience demonstrates that this is not an inevitable outcome. Rather, the data reported in this paper suggests that EAP practitioners and other teaching-focused staff can attain the professional recognition they need to feel integrated into mainstream culture of a university. However, these data also indicate that construction of their professional identities requires nurturing; two colleagues hired at the same time as Carol soon abandoned the construction of their EAP practitioner identities. It was argued that narrative inquiry approaches to professional learning can be used as one means of supporting and promoting the identity construction work of language educators in higher education institutions around the globe.

A limitation of this study is that data were collected from a single EAP practitioner at one university who had experienced some success in her LTIs work. This study should be complemented by research exploring the stories of those former members of the LC who, unlike Carol, chose alternative career paths as there is no suggestion in this paper that the reasons for their exiting Riverside mirror the identity tensions and struggles experienced by Carol. In addition, Carol's LTIs work, in common with all teachers, is not a state but an ongoing process. Nor is there any suggestion that this LTIs work has successfully addressed the specific identity tensions described above. Therefore, future research might also benefit from the use of longitudinal methods that allow for the investigation of LTIs work in higher education over an extended time frame, exploring how LTIs at one moment in time can be reconstructed in the future. Finally, the exclusive use of a semi-structured interview to collect retrospective data is also a limitation of the study because it fails to capture the dynamic nature of meaning making: the meanings of identities such as "EAP teacher" emerge, are negotiated, accepted, contested, and possibly rejected partly during communication with others. Therefore, real-time interactions of teaching-focused staff with other stakeholders should be collected through classroom observation, for example.

Declarations

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