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**‘Just go away and do it and you get marks’: The degradation of language teaching in neoliberal times**

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### **Abstract**

The marketization of education in countries like the UK may be seen as part and parcel of the rise of neoliberalism as the dominant shaper of policy and practice in many societies from the late twentieth century onwards. This paper explores how marketization has impacted on two initial teacher preparation programmes and focuses on the Cambridge English Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) as a particular kind of market driven model. It begins with a discussion of neoliberalism, marketization and the conditions of labour in neoliberal capitalism, making clear the complexity of these phenomena as well as the serious implications that they have for language teacher education. It then moves to a consideration of data from a specific CELTA course where some of these key issues can be seen to play out in ways which we suggest give cause for concern. Our conclusion is that programmes of this type both index and reinforce a model of English as purely instrumental and disembedded from social context and a model of professional activity which is highly instrumental and emblematic of the kind of deskilling and discrediting which have occurred in many professional sectors in recent decades.

## Introduction

We begin this paper with an interview excerpt<sup>1</sup>:

... many of the issues on the course seem to be determined by the government / or by political or social services / and we're not allowed to talk about them (.5) which allows us to do what they want us to do (1) there seems to be one sort of model of teaching and how to do things / that's what the standards are / that's what we have to work towards /or we don't get the qualification (.5) there's not much diversity / no (.5) it's very much (.5) everything is done by objectives (.5) there's this one (.5) you identify targets / and you have this nice sheet with meetings and arrangements /and you have to identify targets every week (.5) in this week I'm working especially towards pronunciation / it's really silly /

This excerpt is taken from interviews conducted by Author 1 some 15 years ago as part of a study of how Spanish, French and German nationals adapted to English education both during and after a one year PGCE-MFL (Postgraduate Certificate of Education-Modern Foreign Languages) course meant to prepare them for full time teaching of languages in English state schools (Block, 2001, 2002, 2005). Harald<sup>2</sup>, who was from Germany, shows his contempt for what he sees as the imposition of a particular version of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the official methodology to be followed without question, going so far as to suggest that there were 'issues ... determined by the government or by political or social services' which PGCE students were 'not allowed to talk about'. Like his fellow students on the course, he was not impressed with the discourses of science and rigour surrounding the teaching of methodology, with 'standards', 'objectives' and 'targets' being some of the keywords involved. He also saw this teaching model as little more than a loose amalgam of discrete practices which provided learners with neither a thorough knowledge of the target language in grammatical, lexical and phonological terms, nor the ability to

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<sup>1</sup> Transcription conventions can be found at the end of this paper in Appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all cited informants throughout the paper.

communicate spontaneously and fluently when the occasion arose. In his eyes, there was nothing particularly scientific or rigorous about it.

Harald's comment is an appropriate beginning to this article as it goes to the heart of a trend in initial teacher education in Britain, Europe and indeed around the world, towards ever-more directed approaches. These approaches are about tighter control over what teachers can and cannot do, and following Harald, what they can and cannot say about their teaching. In this paper we explore this move towards narrowing alternatives in teaching by focusing on British second language teacher preparation programmes in two sectors - the state school sector and the PGCE qualification (to which we have already referred), and the private language school sector and the CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) qualification. Although superficially different, we will suggest that these programmes have come to share a number of common features as a consequence of the increasingly marketised climate created in which language teaching and learning take place.

The marketization of education in countries like the UK may be seen as part and parcel of the rise of neoliberalism as the dominant shaper of policy and practice in many societies from the late twentieth century onwards, although, as will be argued below, it should not be conflated with it or otherwise synonymized with it. This paper explores how marketization has impacted on two initial teacher preparation programmes and focuses on the Cambridge English Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) as a particular kind of market driven model. In effect, our key point is that these programmes (and surely many others around the world today) both index and reinforce a model of English as purely instrumental and disembodied from the social contexts in which it both emerges as a mediator of communication, and a model of professional activity which is highly instrumental and indeed, emblematic of the kind of deskilling and discrediting which have occurred in many professional sectors in recent decades. However, before taking on such issues, we begin this paper with an overview of the theoretical backdrop, outlining what we mean by neoliberalism, marketization and the conditions of labour in neoliberal capitalism. This necessarily detailed account is justified, we believe, given the complexity of the issues raised and the serious implications these have for language teacher preparation. From there we move on to a

consideration of data from a specific CELTA course where some of these key issues can be seen to play out in ways which we suggest give cause for concern.

### **Neoliberalism, marketization and individualization**

Neoliberalism may be understood as the further advancement of traditional capitalism, but by more efficient means in more globalized and technologically advanced times. As explained in texts which have been published in recent years (e.g. Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006; Dunn, 2009; Harvey, 2005, 2010, 2014; Panitch & Gindlin, 2013; Peck, 2010), neoliberalism entails a number of diverse phenomena, activities and behaviours. These include the incessant reduction of the welfare state through cuts to public services; the concomitant privatization of many of those public services which the state no longer funds; the imposition of regressive tax regimes which favour the rich while penalising the less well off; and the deregulation of the financial markets, leading to a 'footloose' or 'casino' capitalism in which practitioners know no territorial limits, nor show any responsibility to national states, communities or individuals. In parallel with the rise of such phenomena in contemporary capitalism, there has been a turn to the market as the master metaphor for framing understandings of all manner of activity in day-to-day life. The notion of the market has been around for some time in political economy: while for Adam Smith, it was the on-the-whole self-regulating site where 'by treaty, by barter, and by purchase ... we obtain from one another the greater part of those mutual good offices which we stand in need of' (Smith 1986 [1776] 119), for Karl Marx (1976 [1867]), it was the site or social space (indeed, an uneven playing field) which compelled individuals (the proletariat) to enter into the processes of buying and selling commodities to satisfy their basic needs and wants. Needless to say, it is Smith's more benign version of the market which has been adopted in recent times by politicians, economists and lay people in general.

The effect of the adoption of the market metaphor has been that domains of social activity, which had previously been organized according to criteria which had to do with community and institution building, have come to be framed in terms of economic exchange. And in these processes, the individuals and collectives participating in the

practices constituting social activity are framed in terms of their roles as providers and consumers. In this sense, as Joanna Williams (2013: 11) notes, ‘marketisation [is] primarily ... the process by which institutions compete for customers’. Generally government led, marketization means that while an area like education continues to have as its prime function the socialization of children to the norms and ways of dominant society through control and disciplining of the content of a range of knowledge domains (and this, despite the ongoing efforts of academics and educators to make education about reducing inequality in increasingly stratified societies), the ways in which it is planned, delivered and evaluated come to resemble (or, in effect, they are the same as) those which apply in the private sector. Competition and the drive towards ever greater efficiency take over for the basic notions of functionality and public service provision for all.

However, because human beings remain as the primary deliverers of these marketized public services in neoliberal times, we are left with the question of what kind of human beings are necessary to take on this role. In this way, the market reaches deep down, having a profound impact on individual and collective subjectivities. As Wendy Brown puts it, ‘neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life ... [and i]t figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for “self-care”—the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions’ (Brown, 2005: 43). Brown bases her views on an early summary by Thomas Lemke of Michel Foucault’s discussion of *homo economicus* in his renowned lectures on ‘biopolitics’ at the Collège de France in 1978-79. Relevant to this paper is Foucault’s discussion of Gary Becker’s (1993) human capital theory as a return to the notion of the individual as *homo economicus*, as a ‘one of two partners in the process of exchange’, all of which ‘entails ... an analysis of utility of what he is himself, a breakdown of his behaviour and ways of doing things’ (Foucault, 2008: 225). In Becker’s view, individuals are free agents who weigh the cost of the education and training as they seek to make themselves more competitive on the job market. The self is seen as a bundle of skills in which individuals invest in a rational and calculating way. In his forceful and

incisive analysis of the rise and consolidation of neoliberalism, Peter Mirowski sums up matters well:

... neoliberalism .... reduces the human being to an arbitrary bundle of “investments,” skill sets, temporary alliances (family, sex, race), and fungible body parts. “Government of self” becomes the taproot of all social order, even though the identity of the self evanesces under the pressure of continual prosthetic tinkering ... Under this regime, the individual displays no necessary continuity from one “decision” to the next. The manager of You becomes the new ghost in the machine. (Mirowski, 2013: 59)

Before addressing the ways in which neoliberalism has impacted on the training of language teachers, and in particular teachers in the commercial English language sector, we turn briefly to the work of Harry Braverman which provides a useful lens for the examination of the way in which the specific kind of work teachers do has been reconfigured.

### **Braverman as a framework to understand the conditions of labour in language teaching**

In his classic book, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, Harry Braverman (1974) provides a detailed account of the state of industrial relations in the post-Second World War industrialized economies of the world, with a particular focus on the United States. The major theme developed throughout is captured in the subtitle of the book: the degradation of work in the twentieth century. Braverman examines the modes of ‘scientific’ industrial management, labour processes in industrial settings and the effects of technological change on industrial management and labour processes. He starts with Marx’s incisive assessment of how human labour is different from animal labour in *Capital 1*:

We are not dealing here with those instinctive forms of labour which remain on the animal level. ... We presuppose labour in a form which is an exclusively human characteristic. A spider conducts operations which resemble those of a weaver, and a bee would put to shame many a human architect by the construction of his honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect

from the best of bees is that the architect builds his cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the very end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence [it] already existed ideally. (Marx, 1976 [1867]: 283-284)

Indeed, what differentiates human beings from animals is not only that they can reflect on their labour before, during and after it takes place, but that they have an affective investment in it. And this affective investment serves as a base for the negative feelings that arise when labour processes are wrested from the control of workers, that is, alienation. Marx explains matters as follows in *1844 Manuscripts*:

What constitutes the alienation of labor? First, the fact that labor is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. ... his labor is ... not voluntary but coerced; it is *forced labor*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. (Marx, 1988 [1844]: 74)

Early in the book, Braverman presents the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor (1998), the originator of 'Taylorism', which provides the philosophical basis for Fordism, or assembly line management, and which embodies the key characteristics of automatised, industrial activity. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Taylorism represented the cutting edge of 'scientific management', defined by Braverman as 'an attempt to apply the methods of science to the increasingly complex problems of the control of labor in rapidly growing capitalist enterprises' (Braverman 1974: 59). In a Taylorist approach to labour management, every action which forms part of a task was broken down into a series of segments, which often last a fraction of a second. The aim was to control time and movement with a view to increasing efficiency, to say nothing of predictability in the workplace. The famous time and motion studies were based on the observation of how the minutest of actions were carried out, with a view to calculating how much time they both took and might take if pressure were put on workers to move faster. As David Ferguson (2000) notes, this meant first of all the compilation description of the principal

manual tasks in a workplace, such as ‘plan’ (deciding on a course of action), ‘search’ (attempting to find an object using the eyes and hands), ‘select’ (choosing among several objects in a group), ‘inspect’ (determining the quality or the characteristics of an object using the eyes and/or other senses), ‘assemble’ (joining two parts together) and ‘disassemble’ (separating multiple components that were joined). It also meant calculating how much time the minutest of activities required of workers.

Despite its veneer of objectivity, such an initiative has little or nothing to do with a desire to investigate and improve productivity (and with it, workplace conditions) in a scientific manner, something which would have benefited both capital and labour. Rather, it was about serving the interests of capital and its need to control, at all levels, the means and ways of production. For Braverman, scientific management ‘enters the workplace not as the representative of science, but as the representative of management masquerading in the trappings of science’ (Braverman 1974: 59). Further to this, he sums up the importance and the outcome of the application of such systems to the workplace as follows:

The attempt to conceive of the worker as a general-purpose machine operated by management is one of many paths taken towards the same goal: the displacement of labor as the subjective element in the labor process and its transformation into an object. Here the entire work operation, down to its smallest motion, is conceptualized by the management and engineering staffs, laid out, measured, fitted with training and performance standards – all entirely in advance. (Braverman, 1974: 124)

Such management was ultimately concerned with the skills which workers might possess: skills brought with them when hired and skills acquired through on-the-job training. For Braverman, the entire notion of skill had by the early 1970s suffered something of a transformation, as it had become disembedded from any notion of craft and pride in work which it would have entailed when workers knew something about the details and constituent parts of production processes. As he explained:

For the worker, the concept of skill is traditionally bound up with craft mastery – that is to say, the combination of knowledge of materials and processes with the practiced manual dexterities required to carry on a specific branch of production. The breakup of craft skills and the reconstruction of production as a collective or social process have destroyed the traditional conception of skill and opened up only one way for mastery of labor process to develop: in and through scientific, technical, and engineering knowledge. (Braverman 1974: 307)

We do not believe that all of what Braverman had to say some 40 years ago applies to the language teaching profession today. In fact, Braverman mentioned education very little and teachers were not cited as an example of a profession going through Taylorisation processes (unlike, clerks, for example, to whom he devotes an entire chapter). However, we do see a creeping Taylorism making inroads into education in many parts of the world, a good example being in the UK where a long list of surveillance measures (e.g. inspections, examinations, and paperwork having to do with the documentation of practices) have been introduced by governments to keep teachers in line. And, in the same way that communication has been disciplined and made uniform in many social domains, ranging from the workplace (see references to call centres above) to personal relationships (see the growth of self-help literature over the past four decades), so too ways of talking about language teaching- and above all, language teaching itself, have become more routine, uniform and predictable. We thus see Taylorist tendencies in initial teacher preparation programmes such as the PGCE and CELTA – to which we turn in a moment.

At this point, some readers may find our linking of Taylorist principles with neoliberalism counterintuitive, especially if they accept a particular construction of the latter as being about employees as flexible self-managers as opposed to limited operatives (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006; Brown, 2005; Mirowski, 2013). However, while the neoliberal emphasis on self-management may seem to suggest that Taylorist principles are no longer relevant, our discussion of initial teacher preparation programmes in this paper indicates that this is clearly not the case. Once again, we face a constant in the history of capitalism, namely, how ideology works according to Marx and Engels (1998: 42), making ‘men [sic] and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*’, or in this case making what is effectively a worsening of

professional conditions appear as something akin to an opportunity for self-development.

### **Initial teacher preparation**

One of the key issues in any approach to initial teacher preparation is the balance to be struck between training and education. That said, the former term has fallen out of favour somewhat over the last few years – at least among teacher educators. For example, novice teachers on the British PGCE programme which confers *qualified teacher status* and allows graduates to work in the state-school system are more commonly referred to today as ‘student teachers’ than as ‘trainee teachers’. At the same time, what used to be called ‘teacher training’ is more commonly referred to as ‘initial teacher education’. This change in nomenclature seeks to avoid the negative associations ‘trainee’ and ‘training’ may be said to imply, with their connotations of the transmission of a pre-determined set of behaviours to novices who are seen largely as blank slates. Classic definitions of both these terms have been provided by Henry Widdowson (1990: 62) and they are worth quoting at length here:

Training is a process of preparation towards the achievement of a range of outcomes which are specified in advance. This involves the acquisition of goal-oriented behaviour which is more or less formulaic in character and whose capacity for accommodation to novelty is, therefore, very limited. Training, in this view, is directed at providing solutions to a set of predictable problems and sets a premium on unreflecting expertise. It is dependent on the stability of existing states of affairs since it assumes that future situations will be predictable replicas of those in the past.

Widdowson (1990: 62) contrasts training with education, which he defines as follows:

Education on the other hand is not predicated on predictability in this way. It provides for situations which cannot be accommodated into preconceived patterns of response but which require a reformulation of ideas and the modification of established formulae. It focuses, therefore, not on the application of ready-made problem-solving techniques but on the critical appraisal of the

relationship between problem and solution as a matter of continuing enquiry and of adaptable practice.

At the same time, Widdowson (1990: 64) reminds us that novices ‘clearly have to feel secure in their own role, and establish their own identity, before indulging in experimentation which could undermine their authority before they have actually acquired it’. Therefore he suggests that initiation into the ‘craft and culture of pedagogy’ means perforce some degree of conformity to pre-existing practices and that ‘pre-service or initial preparation needs to pay particular attention to training’; significantly, he adds:

This is not to say that such courses would not also encourage an awareness of wider theoretical implications or the kind of appraisal I have associated with education, but this would be more in the manner of a long-term investment rather than something expected to yield immediate returns, something which might influence attitude rather than instigate action (Widdowson 1990: 64-65).

On this view, it would be ill-advised to see training entirely in negative terms – quite the reverse in fact, but it does raise the issue of how awareness of theoretical considerations can best be fostered on pre-service courses such as the PGCE or the CELTA where induction into the craft and culture of pedagogy are central. Decisions about the preparation of teachers, whether politically dictated as in the case of the former qualification, or commercially determined as in the case of the latter, inevitably involve addressing the training/education dichotomy, and in both instances beliefs about what a teacher is, or what a teacher should be, are key in establishing the precise nature of the balance achieved.

### **The PGCE and neoliberal ‘reform’**

As previously stated, the extract at the beginning of this paper is related to the experiences of a novice teacher during the teaching practice component of the PGCE-MFL. Under the influence of neoliberal ‘reform’ in the UK, the certification of teachers in Britain was at the time already moving away from a university-based education model towards a school-based training one – a reorientation that was increasingly understood in terms of apprenticeship. This change was part of a general downgrading

of the teaching profession, from informed and autonomous professionals to less informed and disciplined bureaucrats.

As it is currently structured, the PGCE lasts for an academic year – i.e. a total of 150 days more or less, of which the majority - 120 days - are spent in schools on teaching practice. Student teachers must have a degree in a relevant subject (e.g. Spanish, French, German, etc.) and, when not in school, they attend lectures which are normally delivered in a university department of education. These lectures address such topics as the nature and principles of language teaching and learning, the place of languages in the school curriculum, effective and inclusive learning, teaching skills, classroom management, lesson planning, and continuing professional development.

Such a programme – in terms of academic content and in terms of the balance between time spent in the university and in the classroom – is a far cry from the kind of teacher education programme which pre-dated the neoliberal onslaught on British state-school teacher preparation (or indeed the research-based approach found in a country such as Finland today [Salhberg, 2010]). During the 1960s and 1970s British student teachers were also given access to the history, philosophy and sociology of education on the assumption that such a grounding was necessary if teachers were to become a more educated and professional workforce, attuned to the needs of a complex society. With the advent of neoliberal educational policy (in which the kind of education required to meet the needs of a complex society is understood very differently), a teacher's knowledge base has become ever more narrowly focused on teaching skills (a kind of Taylorism light, of effective teaching strategies) and the inculcation of a government-required managerialised professionalism. This narrowing of focus has been increasingly framed by government in terms of a (problematically construed) 'craft' view of teaching. As we shall see, the understanding of craft in this view of teaching is very much at odds with Braverman's view of craft as one which entailed an affective investment on the part of the worker in the labour process. In 2010 the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove vowed to 'reform teacher training [and] shift trainee teachers out of college and into the classroom' – that is to reduce even further the 30 or so days student teachers spend in an academic setting. And he added, '[t]eaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman. Watching others, and being rigorously observed yourself as you develop, is the best

route to acquiring mastery in the classroom’ (Gove, 2010). Over the years that followed, this profoundly narrow view of teaching – which, we will suggest, implies a very limited understanding of craft - was repeatedly articulated in opposition to those who continued to argue for initial teacher education as necessarily entailing more than school-based experience. Disparagingly referred to as ‘the enemies of promise’ and ‘the blob’, Gove argued that such opponents

[...] are all academics who have helped run the university departments of education responsible for developing curricula and teacher training courses. You would expect such people to value learning, revere knowledge and dedicate themselves to fighting ignorance. Sadly, they seem more interested in valuing Marxism, revering jargon and fighting excellence (Gove, 2013).

In Britain then, this craft view of teaching has become associated with ideologically motivated attacks on the perceived negative influence of (leftwing) educationalists on teacher education and a view of teaching that revolves around the imitation of, and observation by, approved old timers. But, as we have seen, Braverman argues (admittedly with a different kind of worker in mind) that craft knowledge also entails ‘knowledge of materials and processes’ (1974: 307); it allows for independent decision making and a high degree of affective involvement. More in line with Braverman than Gove, Gordon Kirk (2011) has argued that teaching *is* indeed a craft, but it is one in which the ‘*personal knowledge* associated with the learning of a craft has to be complemented by the broader knowledge that comes from the review and study of existing academic evidence about the conduct of teaching’ – that is through access to theory and research, or what he calls the ‘*public knowledge* base’ (italics added) which is not available in either classroom or staffroom. From this perspective, craft mastery (with regard to teaching) results from the recursive interplay between evolving personal and public knowledge. It could be argued that this is particularly important for language teachers for whom public knowledge about language may require pedagogical adjustment. Take for example the ways in which new descriptions of the grammar of spoken English (e.g. McCarthy & Carter, 1994) provide teachers with information about language-in-use which it may be appropriate for them to draw on in their teaching contexts. Teachers who have been made aware that one of the most common and least face threatening ways of disagreeing with someone in English is to say ‘Yes, but ...’ are

enabled to re-evaluate the type information often contained in textbooks (e.g. ‘I disagree with that’) - which although grammatically acceptable may be pragmatically less appropriate in many settings.

### **The CELTA: a thoroughly marketized model**

Against this background of the neoliberal ‘reform’ of the PGCE, it is illuminating to consider the case of the CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), a qualification which originated in the private sector and which predates the neoliberal revolution of the 1970, even if it was, from its inception, based on economic liberalism and the free market. The forerunner of the contemporary CELTA began life in the 1960s as commercial English language teaching (which currently includes textbook production and industrial scale testing) began to emerge as a global industry – one which collectively is worth between £3-4 billion today to the British economy. Possession of a CELTA is taken by the industry to indicate a basic level of English language teaching capability, and it functions as an indicator of employability in the largely deregulated global commercial sector.

In terms of emphasis, the CELTA is firmly weighted in favour of training, as described by Widdowson. John Haycraft, the founder of International House – the commercial language school which devised the certificate course which would become the CELTA – was firmly of the view that a school-based approach to teacher preparation was best:

I myself favour teacher training being in a school where teaching practice and observation of classes are much easier. I regret that when comprehensive schools were founded in Britain, training colleges were not incorporated as well. Instead, teacher training, as in most countries, is isolated from the classroom in separate buildings and, as a result, training tends to be excessively theoretical (Haycraft, 1984: 141).

Excessively theoretical is not a charge that could be made against the CELTA. As it is currently structured, the course lasts 120 hours which are normally spread over 4 weeks. Trainees typically spend up to 40 hours observing each other during teaching practice and are each assessed on 6 hours of teaching. Those taking the course are required to have a standard of education equivalent to that required for entry into higher education. The CELTA is generally offered in language schools where observation of experienced

teachers is also possible, and the course content is limited to language analysis for teaching purposes and communicative language teaching methodology. All input is closely linked to teaching practice, with both these course components generally running simultaneously – a feature which, combined with the short time-scale, tends to create a somewhat feverish learning environment. Despite the obvious differences between the CELTA and the PGCE (such as the educational level of the course takers, course duration, the kinds of accountability ultimately required of teachers in different sectors, etc.), it could be argued – with reference to the privileging of teaching practice as *the* site of learning about teaching and the limited amount of theoretical content - that the changes to the PGCE described above serve to bring it more in line with the commercial model represented by the CELTA. In this way the PGCE can be said to have been ‘neoliberalised’ in a way that the CELTA has not (the latter being already a thoroughly marketised qualification). Ultimately both qualifications seek to produce a similar kind of teacher – one whose horizons do not extend beyond the micro context of the classroom to the macro context of the social, political and economic conditions within which the classroom is located. In the following section we look a little more closely at the nature of craft knowledge as developed on a CELTA.

### **Guided lesson planning and the development of craft knowledge**

One feature of the CELTA course is guided lesson planning sessions in which trainers work with groups of trainees to help them produce lessons which will meet the pass requirements set by Cambridge English, the qualification’s validating body. In theory these encounters are potentially valuable for the development of trainees’ craft knowledge – although, as we have suggested elsewhere (Gray & Block, 2012), institutional constraints may conspire to restrict the development of what Braverman (1976: 94) called ‘craft knowledge and autonomous control’ of the process of production – in this case of lesson plans over which trainees have some degree of control and ownership. In fact, as we shall see, the concept of craft as understood on the CELTA course is one which is entirely congruent with a Taylorised mode of production and antithetical to any notion of affective investment in the labour process as understood by Braverman.

The extracts from the particular CELTA we focus on here (on which Author 2 was a tutor) are taken from a guided lesson planning session in which a trainee teacher and a

teacher trainer work together on a lesson plan (see also Gray & Block, 2012; Gray & Morton, forthcoming). We also draw on a stimulated recall interview in which the same teacher trainer talked about the interaction. These data were recorded in 2002, since when there has been no significant change to the CELTA programme.

The background is as follows: Gill, a trainee, is working with a trainer who is helping her plan a 40-minute vocabulary lesson which revolves around a set of work-related vocabulary exercises. This lesson has to dovetail with two other 40-minute lessons being taught by other members of the same teaching practice group – the second of which is built around a reading about a job interview, and the third of which consists of a job interview role play. The material being used as the basis for all the lessons comes from a commercially produced textbook.

Although Gill has brought a several sets of job-related pictures to the lesson planning session, thereby indicating a degree of prior thought about the shape her lesson might take, it becomes clear very quickly that she has problems envisaging exactly how the lesson might unfold. Despite the trainer's repeatedly positive evaluations of the material in the textbook (e.g. 'this has got a nice jobs sort of theme running through it', 'I mean look it seems to me it's really straightforward here'), Gill appears to have a different lesson plan in mind to the one envisaged by the trainer. After some negotiation over an exercise in the textbook which the trainer agrees it would be wise to drop, Gill says:

Gill: ... and then and then / I was thinking you know / to get more towards the freer practice / at the end again / maybe even do a bit of like role play / I was thinking this is where maybe you (1) we've crossed a bit erm

Trainer: ((disapproving noise)) no don't go / don't go into role play =

Gill: = okay

(Gray and Morton, forthcoming)

Although Gill's comment 'we've crossed a bit' indicates that she is aware that she may be encroaching on another trainee's territory, she appears to see 'freer practice' as integral to the vocabulary lesson she is planning. Her use of the definite article with 'freer practice' would also seem to confirm this, suggesting that for her this is something all lessons have. Furthermore, her reference to doing this 'at the end' implies that she has a basic PPP (presentation, practice, production) template in mind for her lesson. If we turn to the stimulated recall interview with the trainer (recorded shortly

after the lesson planning session), we get an indication of why the role play suggestion was met with disapproval:

I suppose I'm thinking about some kind of integrated lesson where a theme is running throughout the entire afternoon / although there may be three different teachers erm / I suppose I'm thinking about it / or I'm hoping that they will look at the two hours of teaching practice as a single lesson that the students have / although the three trainees do maybe different parts of that lesson

The trainer thus reveals an altogether different understanding of the afternoon's teaching practice as a single lesson taught by three trainees – rather than three individual lessons. His rejection of the suggestion to 'do a bit of like role play' may be related to the fact that he sees 'freer practice' as coming in the third trainee's role play – and therefore beyond the scope of Gill's lesson. Whatever the reason, these different conceptualisations of the activity both parties are engaged in do not emerge in the interaction – something which may account in part for the way in which things subsequently unfold.

The mention of the role play leads the trainer to abandon any attempt to negotiate a lesson plan with Gill. Instead, he plans the entire lesson for her step by step. This interaction begins as follows:

Trainer: ... this could be your way in / it could be it could be underneath / you could do jumbled letters

Gill: ah ah / right

Trainer: So each job this'll be it'll like / okay coalminer so it'll be like M-I-C erm R / you know whatever it is / and then you do the first one for them / you say okay here are some well known jobs everybody yeah / what I want you to do is to put the letters in the right order / yeah and that's their little that's your little warmer / your little fun intro

Gill: hmm

(Gray & Morton, forthcoming)

This continues until the lesson is completely planned with similar minimal contributions from Gill. What we see here is in effect a largely Taylorised approach to the production of the lesson plan. Gill is given not only a recipe for the vocabulary lesson, but also the

actual words to use when addressing the students are ventriloquised for her. The problem with this kind of ‘directive help’ (Wertsch, 1985) is that it does not allow for the exploration of Gill’s problems with the material, and the trainer effectively limits what she might know about the larger and more complex processes of language teaching and learning. The resulting plan, to echo the quotation from Marx earlier, is the one which already existed ideally in the mind of the trainer who already knows the rules of the CELTA game – but it is one over which Gill has been given little control or ownership. More worryingly, her own (admittedly vague plan) which included pictures and ‘freer practice’ has not been allowed to emerge.

Gill’s response to this help is notable for what it tells us about the development of craft knowledge. Rather than produce the sequentially relevant response to the trainer’s lesson plan, she produces instead a question, and one that is not strictly relevant to the concrete detail of the lesson just described. Gill’s question can be seen as an attempt to move the discourse from the level of a blow-by-blow sequence of how to stage a lesson to that of a ‘general structure’ for a vocabulary lesson and to reposition herself as a participant (rather than a recipient) in the interaction.

Gill: so what’s like the general structure for a vocabulary lesson / or is there not really a set one you just =

Trainer: = well sometimes you see sometimes / you’re going to be doing vocabulary on its own / this is like this is like a kind of segregated vocabulary slot / that’s focusing on jobs and duties / that’s related to the theme of the lesson erm / but sometimes vocabulary’s going to be / like in / in whoever’s doing the reading in B’s [another trainee] / where it’s linked very much to the reading that’s coming up yeah

Gill: mmm

Trainer: erm but I don’t think there’s any one way to necessarily do something / yeah

Gill: okay

(Gray & Morton, forthcoming)

In the stimulated recall interview, the trainer commented on this repositioning move by Gill as follows:

Well it's obvious that she thinks / that she / I think she had a structure for a / a general structure for a vocabulary lesson in her mind yeah / and I've somehow broken that / erm by suggesting what I've suggested / erm and she asking me to clarify that doubt that she now has / I think that's what that is / I mean I think very often on training courses / you know / it's all about we hold hoops up and get people to jump through them and we don't very often / you know / we say this is the way to do it / just go away and do it / and you get marks / you get boxes ticked if you're shown to do it / I think Gill being the kind of person that she is probably had a kind of little framework in her mind for a vocabulary lesson / and something that I've done in that session has / has shattered that a little bit / it might be the freer practice / because she might now think there isn't any freer practice / and she may think that in fact that is something that has to be there

When pushed by the interviewer to clarify what he meant by 'I don't think there's any one way to necessarily do something', the trainer replied:

I mean it's very difficult / isn't it / on a training course where you're training people to do one thing / and at the same time you're also trying to say / you know / at the same time / there's more than one way to skin a cat

Both these responses go to the heart of the problem of inducting novices into the 'craft and culture of pedagogy' (Widdowson, 1990: 64) on an initial training course. It is also clear that the trainer is aware of this – as his reference to jumping through hoops and ticking boxes suggests. These are typical ways of describing activity in which there is little or no affective investment on the part of the speaker and may indicate the trainer's own frustration with his role. It has been suggested that the extreme shortness of the CELTA is one of the major problems with this approach to teacher preparation (Morton & Gray, 2008) - quite simply there is not enough time for the kind of exploration of the principles under-pinning planning choices and the consideration of alternatives which is necessary for the encouragement of, as Widdowson suggests, awareness of wider theoretical implications. Rather, as we see from the stimulated recall, the emphasis is on jumping through hoops and ticking boxes. Had it not been for Gill's question about a

general structure for a vocabulary lesson, the important message that vocabulary lessons could take more than one form might not have been conveyed.

Elsewhere we have suggested that minimally trained teachers are precisely what the commercial sector wants and values (Gray & Block 2012). In many parts of the world the commercial English language sector is staffed by young migrant workers with qualifications such as the CELTA. Such teachers are frequently poorly paid, they tend not to be unionised, and their contracts are short-term. What the sector requires is in fact a workforce capable of delivering a standardised product into the educational marketplace, capable of using basic tools of the trade such as textbooks – but with little of the reasoning skills Gill felt the need for. As Braverman (1976: 94) concluded with regard to industrial labour, such processes serve to ‘strip the workers of craft knowledge and autonomous control and confront them with a fully thought-out labor process in which they function as cogs and levers’. Something very similar we would suggest - *mutatis mutandis* – is what is happening here.

## **Conclusion**

Hilda: I'm not convinced about the course / I don't like it.

Arnold: what do you mean you don't like it? / the whole profession of teaching?

Hilda: the whole profession of teaching. / I don't agree with the school system in England / I think if I don't agree with it now / I either have to get on with it / compromise / or I can't do it and I have to / I mean that's what I'm doing

Arnold: I'm also compromising (.5) sometimes I think / are they really mad here? / because I just don't understand it / but then I think (.5) it's a compromise (.5) when you compromise / you actually think it's OK.

This is a second interview excerpt from the PGCE study cited in the introduction to this paper. Hilda and Arnold are two German nationals who just two and half months into their course, and having begun their teaching practice, express serious doubts about their futures as teachers of German in English secondary schools. Like Harald, who was cited in the introduction, they are reacting to what they see as the imposition of a long list of rules about how they should teach, all of which revolves around the rather

narrow interpretation of the National Curriculum and communicative language teaching which they and their fellow non-British course attendees were constructing as they completed their PGCE course. These teachers conceived CLT as a confining set of prefabricated teaching bites which did not awaken interest in the minds of their students. This is an interesting take on CLT, which in its triumphant period (the 1970s and 80s), was presented as something akin to a liberation pedagogy for language teachers in Europe and eventually around the world. However, it serves notice, and not for the last time we are sure, that what is often dressed up as progressivism and freedom, is by other interpretations, anything but. Of great interest here, some 15 years later, is the voice of resignation coming through, particularly in Arnold's final utterance: 'when you compromise / you actually think it's OK'.

Ultimately, Arnold, Hilda and Harald's words are a response to the attempt to mould the perfect language teacher in England circa 2000. However, what they say resonates with Gill's experiences, in a very different context, some two years later. And with the new policies of the Conservative-led government in power in the UK at the time of writing (see above), their words remain no doubt relevant for teachers doing the PGCE course today. When craft is distorted and turned on its head, so that it becomes little more than skill-providing and skill taking (or recipe giving and recipe taking), teachers are faced with some very important decisions. Should they just get on with their course of study, playing along with their tutors who transmit to them the 'right' way to do things? In this case, the plan may well be to wait until the course is finished and a teaching position is secured to begin to exercise more autonomy as a language teacher. In effect, this is what Author 1 saw happen with his cohort of PGCE course graduates in year two of his study: once they were thoroughly emancipated from the course and they had their own classrooms and their own students, they were freer to try to subvert at least some aspects of the top-down, rule-laden educational culture in which they worked. Nevertheless, it should be noted that they were still subject to the panoptic regime of control and exaggerated accountability which has become so engrained in the day-to-day functioning of British education.

On the other hand, trainee teachers may rebel against the imposed norms of behaviour passed down to them by tutors. In this case a teacher like Gill might voice stronger

resistance to her tutor than was the case here. Indeed, as we note elsewhere (Gray & Block, 2012), in other exchanges with her tutor, she did just this, dropping an activity and refusing to cede to pressures from her tutor to do the contrary. However, this act of resistance was fairly timid and in other parts of the session she gave into the tutor's demands on several occasions.

Elsewhere, we express the view that part of the problem lies with the way that language education is conceived inside academia (in courses ranging from the PGCE to MA TESOL and MA MFL programmes) and in the private sector (see the range of courses run by institutions such as the British Council and International House):

Our own view is that the knowledge base of language teacher education – precisely because of its location at the interstices of a range of disciplines which include linguistics, education, philosophy and sociology - needs to be informed by insights and theory from the social sciences. Failure to explore common ground with the social sciences, we suggest, ultimately runs the risk of intellectually impoverishing the field and weakening it politically. (Gray & Block, 2012: 141-142).

However, the bigger problem is systemic and not just at the level of language education or even education in general. Indeed, as long as neoliberalism endures - and as Colin Crouch (2011) notes, as a set of ideas and practices it has been amazingly resilient in the midst of a crisis which by any responsible estimation was caused by the implementation of neoliberal policies - we are perhaps condemned to taking on the degradation of language teaching at only the most superficial of levels. In Marxist terms, we need to deal with education as a superstructural phenomenon which is inextricably linked to the economic base of society and understand that profound changes in the former are difficult without profound changes in the latter. The economic base is at this point in history constituted by the model of capitalism (call it neoliberalism, call it 'late') in which we and everything we do are currently enmeshed. And as distant as it might seem from the worlds of Harald or Gill or Hilda or Arnold, it is where we must begin to act if we are ever to manage to effect transformative change, educational or otherwise. As for what kind of action is in order, we suggest that language teacher educators need to recognise the ways in which the courses

they teach may be part of the problem. While clearly having to work within the constraints of these courses, they could - as the CELTA trainer suggested in his stimulated recall - signal where possible that there is always more than one way to 'skin a cat'. They could also be more informative to student cohorts about the actual nature of what they are involved in – namely the production of teachers in a politico-economic context in which beliefs about education, ways of producing educators and ways of teaching are frequently in tension with government and commercial imperatives.

However, we remain pessimistic about the ultimate worth of such actions if they are taken without actually taking on deeper systemic aspects of capitalism. Author 1 of this paper recently attended a conference on Critical Discourse Analysis, during which many of those present were voicing unhappiness about the progressive erosion of academic freedom and the worsening labour conditions at universities in their countries of origin. In a general discussion on this topic, he floated the idea that unless we seek change that goes to the base of the economic regimes in which we live, and therefore unless we produce some kind of systemic changes which are transformative, that is 'remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework' (Fraser, 2008: 28), then we are only scratching at the surface. In effect we are adopting relatively superficial palliatives which may make the lives of academics a little better, but they will do little more as they do not go to the root of the problem. Perhaps, then, everyone in education should align themselves with those working in other professions and sectors of the economy to take on board what this actually means with regard to action.

## Appendix 1: Transcription Conventions

|         |                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| /       | indicates the minimal but clear pause between phrases/sentences in normally paced speech.                                                         |
| (.5)    | indicates pause of half a second                                                                                                                  |
| (1)     | indicates pause of one second                                                                                                                     |
| ?       | indicates rising intonation (including questions)                                                                                                 |
| =       | indicates that the utterance latches with (i.e. occurs seamlessly after) the next utterance                                                       |
| ((xxx)) | comments describing aspects of extra-linguistic communication, such as voice inflection, laughter, facial expressions, gaze, hand movements, etc. |

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