**Maintaining the status quo: symbolic violence in higher education**

Jo Watson a and Jacqueline Widin b

a Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Southampton, Highfield, Southampton SO17 1BJ, UK.

b Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Technology Sydney, Broadway, 2007, Australia

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**Abstract**

Government policies and financial imperatives have fostered growing heterogeneity in student bodies in UK and Australian higher education, but the underpinning logic of practice in these long-established social fields is far slower to change. Drawing on empirical evidence from case studies in each nation, this paper examines the tensions between the espoused and enacted values of the academy in relation to the widening participation and internationalization agendas. We describe the research sites, their relationships with their respective fields of power, and the experiences of participants as inhabitants of these higher education fields. We highlight the struggles to secure relevant capital, acts of symbolic violence occurring at both institutional and program levels, and the resultant impact on individual positions and trajectories within the fields. Finally, we consider the extent to which the established practices in higher education, which naturally preserve the dominance of the dominating factions, are likely to shift to enable it to genuinely enact the social conscience it espouses.

**Key words:** higher education; power; symbolic violence; cultural capital; widening participation; internationalisation

**Introduction**

Government policies and, increasingly, financial imperatives in the UK and Australia have underpinned the growing heterogeneity of their respective student bodies. This paper draws upon two case studies, one located within each context, to provide an account of struggles taking place as universities adopt strategies to attract and retain different student groups. The UK case focuses on a research intensive university opening its doors to students entering under the widening participation agenda, while the Australian case explores the dynamics of activity centred on the internationalization of education. The cases differ markedly in some respects, including the academic disciplines and background characteristics of the students concerned, but the practices of the two institutions operating within their respective fields display what Bourdieu would describe as remarkable ‘homologies’ in, for example, systems of hierarchies, struggles for funding and policy tensions.

With much of his research considering his own academic culture within a wider intellectual field (see, for example, Bourdieu 1984), Bourdieu’s work is of particular interest in examining higher education (HE). He emphasises the need for researchers investigating their own social spaces to break with taken-for-granted practices as a means of better understanding and perhaps even changing the logic of practice (Bourdieu 1988 p.4). As academics and researchers who have worked in the broad fields of allied health professional and adult and language education, we draw on Bourdieu’s conceptual framework and his key explanatory devices as the basis for analysing and understanding higher educational issues and power relations (Bourdieu 1990a, 1989, 1984). ‘Fields’ represent the arenas of life or social spaces within which particular practices occur. The stakes or resources holding symbolic value within a field, which are the subject of competition defining individual positions or status within it, are referred to as ‘capital’. Finally, ‘habitus’ refers to each individual’s established disposition and ways of being in and perceiving the world.

Central to this paper is Bourdieu’s concept of ‘symbolic violence’ which refers to ‘power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977 p.4). Symbolic violence therefore reinforces and legitimises inequalities (Wacquant 1998). Embodied within a field and expressed through and influencing individual habitus (Grenfell 2004), it is inherent in any teaching and learning process and in both case studies discussed here is exercised at institutional and program levels. The forms of capital valued within and the logic of practice of a field are functions of the distribution of power within that field. When higher education undertakes its various activities, it imposes the culturally arbitrary conditions of an arbitrary power (Bourdieu and Passeron 1997 p.8) under the guise of legitimate order, serving to privilege those already in the most dominant field positions (Grenfell and James 1998).

An HE field is both dominating and dominated within the broader national and international fields of power, and is itself a contested, uneven space. The case studies discussed in this paper exemplify the stratifications, differentiations and complexities of the power relations within and surrounding each field. Common features are the manner in which both fields shape and are shaped by government policy and corresponding national and international interests, and our studies provide an opportunity to examine at the types of capital and legitimation processes that are operationalized.

While both case studies yielded rich data about the dynamics and power relations in their respective contexts, we limit ourselves here to probing the tensions between the espoused (e.g. within policy rhetoric and strategic aims) and enacted values of the academy, illuminating the struggles of individuals to accumulate the capital necessary to secure a legitimate place within each context. With both studies reported fully elsewhere (Watson et al 2009, Watson 2013, Widin 2010), we provide here brief descriptions of the case study sites and their relationships with their respective fields of power before offering more detailed accounts of the research participants as inhabitants of these HE fields. We examine the challenges of accumulating relevant capital, the struggles encountered and the positions and trajectories of individuals and groups within the fields, finally considering the scope for changing the established logics of practice.

**The research contexts**

***UK case study site***

Identified as an instrumental vehicle for exploring the educational experiences of non-traditional entrants to HE in a three year longitudinal case study, Mackellar University\* is an older, well-established research-intensive university that typically demands high academic entry criteria. Although its position in national and international league tables identifies it as a reputable institution recognised for the quality of its research and education, Mackellar is ambitious, keen to improve its status and further enhance its standing in the HE field. Research excellence on an international scale is very high on the agenda, as are the economic and social impact of that research, reflecting the high-value status of these forms of capital within the field. Responding to the political emphasis on the quality of student experience in relation to the new UK fees regime, Mackellar identifies a commitment to offering students a personalised experience incorporating opportunities to learn with world-leading researchers and academics.

The student participants in the UK case study were drawn from a sub-group of the allied health professions. The policies, standards and directives of their school, or the micro-field within which students were engaged, were strongly influenced by both Mackellar University as a sub-field of UK HE, the broader HE field itself and the surrounding political and professional fields. Although a small entity within Mackellar, the school’s program documentation highlighted its position in the discipline-specific sub-field of HE by describing its strong reputation amongst its competitors and local employers, and its strong performance for a school of its type in terms of research output.

***Australian case study site***

University Metrop\* (UM) is a large multi-campus city university formed by the amalgamation of various post-secondary institutions in 1988. Internationalisation, in conjunction with increasing international student enrolments, is a key strategic aim of UM, making it a suitable case study site to explore the dynamics and beneficiaries of the spread of English language education in HE (Widin 2010). Both the Australian and UK HE fields are delineated by struggles for the scarce economic and symbolic capital that enhance positional dominance or advantage in the field. Research outputs and excellence, scholarly reputation and prestigious awards attract economic capital in terms of sizable research grants. This, in turn, helps to attract the very academics most likely to win further grants and produce internationally significant outputs to further prestige and dominant positioning within the HE field (Gallagher and Garrett 2012). In the struggle for advantage in the field, and while also competing with ‘sandstone’ research intensive universities for prestigious research funding, UM prioritises accruing economic capital through compliance with government policies, particularly those focussed on attracting students from Indigenous and less privileged socio-economic backgrounds. Reflecting the global trend, it recognises that increasing international student enrolments brings economic and social benefits, including expanding the diversity and volume of the student body and subsequently the skilled workforce.

The participants in the Australian case study were drawn from two UM international English Language Teacher (ELT) training programs: (i) an aid-funded post-graduate ELT training project in South East Asia (SEA) and (ii) an Australian-based post-graduate ELT training course for fee-paying students largely originating from East Asia (EA). UM has an established reputation within the complex and contested field of domestic ELT education, and was drawn to this international activity by the academic, social and pecuniary interests of the staff and institution. This paper provides a snapshot of the data emerging from the wider study (see Widin 2010) to illustrate the dynamics the field in relation to the domination and subordination of certain capitals.

**The fields of power and of higher education**

Both case study sites are located in fields inhabited by powerful national and international institutions. The fields are remarkably similar in that the relationship and interactions between the HE field and the field of political power, represented by government departments, shape and are shaped by government policies. At particular historical moments, the HE field has occupied a more powerful position and more assertively shaped policies such as those governing the composition of the student body; at other times it has been dominated by the political field imposing conditions, often in relation to funding arrangements. The following sections explore the relationship between the field of power and the HE field to further contextualise the logic of practice in each of the case study sites.

***Privilege and power in of the UK field of HE***

Comprised of semi-autonomous institutions largely defining their own purposes (Select Committee 2006 p.1), the UK field of HE is shaped in part by the policies and directives imposed by key government departments and their agents as representatives of the field of political power (Layer 2002). To illustrate, with emphasis shifting from raising aspirations and achievements to retention and employability (HEFCE 2001; Greenbank 2006), the criteria for access to some funding streams shifted from institutional widening participation strategies and action plans to recruitment benchmarks and performance indicators associated with proportions of students from low-participation neighbourhoods, state education and less privileged socio-economic backgrounds (Greenbank 2006).

Clearly illustrating Bourdieu’s observation that players in any given field hold unequal positions, the UK field of HE has long been differentiated. The 1992 dissolution of the divide between universities and polytechnics offering vocational and technical alternatives (Osborne 2003) created a single, stratified field characterised by ‘old’ and ‘new’ universities with divergent reputations and functions. Various mission groups came to represent distinct sub-fields within the sector and include, for example, the prestigious and dominant ‘Russell Group’ which is seen and identifies itself as representing ‘elite’ UK universities (The Russell Group, no date), the ‘1994 Group’ which describes itself as comprising ‘internationally renowned, smaller research intensive universities’ (1994 Group, no date), and the Million+ Group representing many of the ‘new’ universities who ‘meet the challenges of our changing society, offering the flexibility and support that are necessary to broaden participation and add value to the economy’ (Million+ 2008).

These self-formed groups operate to distinguish and advance their positions within the HE field by defining their functions differently and arguing the significance of that function. The dominant field positions of members of the Russell Group are sustained by high levels of economic capital, their ability to attract and retain high-quality researchers and secure significant research funding, thus maintaining or extending their portfolios of valued capital. Older universities also tend to draw a greater proportion of their students from traditional school leavers with high A-level point scores, while new universities recruit a larger proportion of mature students and those from the less privileged social backgrounds (Yorke 2001; BIS 2010). The status of and incentives for research over teaching activity illustrates symbolic violence in action. The additional costs, including time, associated with supporting non-traditional entrants to university detracts from the resources available to dedicate to research activity, which serves to reinforce the established patterns of power, prestige and subordination within the stratified field.

The vigorous debates shaping the future of HE in the UK illustrate that the field is not only answerable to, but can exert influence over the political field. The new model of substantially increased repayable tuition loans (BIS 2010) is premised on an increasingly marketised field in which greater competition between increasingly diverse institutions and, ostensibly, more student choice are envisaged. With the transfer of public funding from institutional teaching grants to student loans for fees, institutional incomes have since 2012/13 been linked to their ability to attract students willing to pay the fees they have established. The nature of the ‘market’, however, is not straight forward and the government continues to seek control over student numbers and expenditure from the public purse. Further, the shifting of the financial burden to students is seen to be at odds with an espoused on-going commitment to supporting social mobility through widening participation and fair access (Milburn 2012).

***Australian universities and internationalisation***

The Australian HE field is similarly differentiated although there are naturally local variations given different historical developments. The focus here is on the way capitals are exchanged in the field of international language education, how project processes legitimated a particular approach to language education, and how the much sought-after enrolment of international students is valued. There is considerable competition amongst Australian universities for international students, yet institutions seem to offer very little to attract students other than foregrounding their reputational or symbolic capital. Although under pressure (AEI 2010), the lucrative international student market remains the third largest export behind coal and iron ore (COAG 2010). Its volatility is frequently characterized in strictly economic terms however Gallagher and Garrett (2012) highlight educational quality and relevance as significant factors in the ebb and flow of international demand.

Symbolic violence is evident in international education activity which is often a one-way process involving students and money flowing from poorer into wealthier countries. Emphasizing national interests, the 2008 Bradley Review’s proposal to increase international student enrolment has since become an explicit goal of all Australian universities (cited in Marginson 2009 p.1). Australian HE policy regards international students as central to the sector’s survival and the anticipated income derived from them is embedded within university budgets.

The exportation of education, especially ELT programs, is complex and messy; the many different layers of practice existing alongside each other often collide or live in contradiction. English language education and its role in the HE marketplace in general is a leading factor in our analysis and illuminating the value attached to and the accumulation of different forms of capital in the internationalisation process offers an important illustration of symbolic violence in action. Here we demonstrate how the linguistic and cultural capital held by the students of recipient countries is subordinated or de-legitimised, while that held by the Australian institution and staff is privileged and legitimised.

The brief field descriptions offered above illustrate the pressures that institutional players experience in each of the case study contexts and the focus of some of the struggles that ensue. As we have seen, the sub-fields explored in each case study are multilayered, intersect with and are surrounded by other fields such as the national and international fields of HE, local political fields of power and the fields of professional practise. Despite the influences of new players within each of these shifting fields, the academy manages broadly to maintain the status quo.

**Student experiences within the fields**

***Mackellar University in the UK***

Thirteen volunteer participants with ‘non-traditional academic backgrounds’ (i.e. non-school leavers and/or those with non-A-Level qualifications) were drawn from a single cohort on a health-related program at Mackellar University. In this longitudinal study, data were collected via initial focus groups exploring participants’ pre-entry educational experiences and expectations of studying in HE, reflective diaries recording the educational experiences participants considered significant or meaningful, and one-to-one semi-structured interviews conducted towards the end of participants’ first and third years of study which focused on exploring their learning experiences within the HE field.

While the academic entry requirements were amongst the highest in the UK for that discipline, competition to secure places on the program might reasonably have lead participants to anticipate that they were appropriately prepared for the education they would encounter. Experiences, however, varied widely. Some participants settled comfortably into the established logic of practice of the new field they had entered, while others attempted to adapt to meet its demands. There were also those who endeavoured to resist the imposition of symbolic violence which implicitly demanded that they adapt, and those that were unable to do so and were ultimately excluded from the field (Watson et al 2009).

Emerging from analysis was a clear picture of the forms of capital profitable within and underpinning successful engagement with the field participants had entered (see Watson 2013 for a full account). Although it is not possible within the scope of this paper to do more than provide some brief illustrative examples, it was clear that social background and habitus shaped existing portfolios of capital and the way that they developed as participants struggled to secure legitimacy within the field. Two contrasting participant stories are drawn upon here to illustrate to role of valued capitals in individual experiences and trajectories within the field.

George’s\* father was an engineer and her mother a teacher. She described a wall of graduation photos in her grandmother’s house that she, her cousins and her brother ‘aspired to’ [family education/employment map], and upon which all were eventually represented. Having left school with a single A-level qualification, George became dissatisfied with her career in human resources, and with the financial and practical support of her husband, elected to pursue a career as a health professional. After completing an additional A-level through correspondence in just seven months while caring for a toddler and a new baby, George’s ambitions required that the family relocate and she entered university at the age of 33. There, her established habitus was more closely aligned with the new field than the one she had left, and she described the experience as ‘like meeting a load of like-minded people’ [first interview].

The congruence between George’s established habitus and the logic of practice of the field was evident in her early ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu 1990a p.66). Describing what for her was the absolute clarity of assessment requirements, and illustrating the value of her established portfolio of academic and linguistic capital, she said: ‘these people who say it wasn’t laid out correctly for them, and people who failed saying “oh, we weren’t told what to do”… and I’m going, well, we were. It’s *right there*, you know!’ [first interview]. Social capital played a particularly significant role in George’s engagement with the field and was frequently alluded to. She was discriminating about who she worked with saying: ‘I think I need to be a little ‘cold’ and strategic and find people with good understanding of subjects and people on similar wavelengths’ [reflective diary], and her approach ensured she developed high-value social capital that afforded the greatest benefit.

Language was scarcely mentioned in George’s data suggesting that she naturally held a repertoire of linguistic capital appropriate to the field and therefore encountered few issues. While she was excited by extending and developing her academic skills, achieving academically and therefore accruing academic capital, her efforts were focused on developing the professionally-oriented capital that was newest to her, and her willingness to challenge both the academic and professional contexts of the field suggested confidence in her position within both. The overwhelming themes emerging from George’s data were of fitting in and of gathering capital – most often very strategically. ‘A fish in water’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p.127) from the outset and throughout her engagement with the field, she was awarded a first class honours degree and was contemplating Masters level study even before graduating.

Standing in stark contrast were the experiences of Tracey\* whose habitus amongst the participants was one of those least congruent with the demands and expectations of the HE field. She explained: ‘If I go back [home], there is no university there…you don’t normally speak to anyone like that. You’re a chamber maid or a shop assistant and there’s a lot of, well, “Why? Why would you wanna go to uni?”’ [interview]. Tracey was the single parent of two ‘quite needy’ sons who remained living several hours away in their home town when she commenced university aged 44 with a recent Access qualification [focus group]. Comparing her circumstances with those of her fellow students, she felt embarrassed and like ‘a bit of an outsider’ [interview] as a result of the complexity of her life and her reliance on financial support from an ex-partner with whom she had a volatile relationship.

Tracey encountered challenges almost immediately. She described living in ‘a flat alone in this block of post-grad students, but it was mostly male and they were quite wealthy and I remember feeling quite out of that, you know […] I felt ever-so different from them…’ [interview]. With a lack of harmony between her own perspectives and experiences and those of fellow healthcare students, Tracey felt excluded by her cohort. She eventually established friendships with students who were themselves marginalised, but as they also held limited stocks of capital relevant to the field, these networks conferred little benefit in advancing her position within it.

Despite her best efforts to identify and produce what was required of her, Tracey struggled; she lacked relevant linguistic and academic capital, and the ‘rules of the game’ were very much obscured and remained so. Tracey recognised that the demands of the new educational field differed from those she had previously encountered saying: ‘I did Psychology [on my Access course] and I got a good mark for it so I’m just wondering why it is not working now? That’s what I don’t really know. It must be really different…’ [interview]. Referring to her attempts to identify the academic level required she said: ‘I’m still trying to work out what it is I think, to be perfectly honest. I mean, I don’t feel it’s beyond me, comprehension-wise. I understand it all. I really like it […] I’m not quite sure what they want. You know, what I think they want isn’t what they want’ [interview].

Tracey she was thrilled to be at university. She felt ‘very proud’ and ‘really important' [interview], but her data was littered with examples of the incongruence between her established habitus and the practices and expectations of the HE field. Although she recognised the opportunities afforded her and her children as a result of successful engagement with the field, Tracey struggled to achieve a tolerable degree of fit or sufficient leverage to secure a legitimate place within it.

George and Tracey experienced the symbolic violence exercised by the field in markedly different ways. If George was ‘a fish in water’, Tracey was very much ‘a fish out of water’, and the overwhelming theme emerging from her data was of incompatibility with the field. Despite her genuine attempts to do and be what was required, to comply with the legitimated order of the field, there was little evidence of her gathering relevant capital. With re-sits yet to be successfully negotiated, unresolved debts owed to the university precluded her continuation and Tracey was formally denied a position in the field.

***Australia’s University Metrop***

The 25 participants in the Australian case study were all English language teachers or teacher educators from SEA and EA associated with one of the two externally funded international education programs. Some were enrolled as students; others were lecturers, advisers or materials developers. UM’s espoused values of access and equity, particularly in the area of cultural and linguistic diversity, were central to program development and to where the benefits supposedly flow. Extracts from interview and documentary analysis data below point to significant features of the field, in particular how symbolic violence privileges the interests of UM despite running counter to its own policy rhetoric.

Entry to the programs required threshold English language skills prescribed by UM and an initial teacher training qualification. Most student participants had actually been teaching for several years, but despite their teaching qualifications, they were required by UM to undertake a basic pre-service EL teacher-training program, effectively de-legitimising their existing credentials. UM espoused a belief that the benefits of, or the cultural capital offered by, its international activities were distributed fairly and equitably. In one sense this assumption was shared by the international student participants who believed that the kudos accrued from successfully completing an Australian ELT degree would lead to a more ‘profitable’ future. In gaining an international ELT qualification, the teachers described themselves as participants in the broader economy of their own country and its future direction.

However, analysis of data from the SEA project revealed that most participants perceived that the interests of host country teachers had been neglected. Weng\* (a SEA Ministry of Education (MOE) participant) was reservedly positive in her summation of the course. She recognized and anticipated that the teachers themselves would benefit in a number of ways, but highlighted what she saw as a gap in UM’s work: the program failed to fully grasp the interests of the participants. While acknowledging it had produced a much-needed textbook-based curriculum where none had previously existed, Weng’s concerns centred on the absence of a coherent and comprehensive plan for training teachers to utilize the new textbook. Her department had responsibility for building a viable education sector for all levels of schooling but was seriously under-resourced with no means of training teachers to implement the new curriculum. Weng was concerned that UM had narrowly interpreted the program’s goals and that its rhetoric about commitment to aid belied its own pecuniary interests.

Trong\*, a high level MOE official, similarly believed that from the outset the teacher education program had failed to take account of the interests of their country’s educational development. He was disappointed that despite having received aid funding to produce an English textbook-based curriculum specifically for local SAE school students, Australian university staff utilized their Australian-based course materials to teach the teachers. Although supposedly a collaborative program, this issue illustrates the relative positionings of the parties within the field and UM’s belief that its academic products are transportable to a completely different context and superior to resources that might be developed locally.

Participants identified a key tension for UM: it had developed two ELT training programs for qualified overseas teachers, but in requiring those who enrolled to undertake teaching practice it failed to recognize or legitimise the cultural capital associated with their existing qualifications and simultaneously concealed the projects’ power relations. These qualified teachers were proficient in English (although enhancing proficiency was advanced as a desired outcome), but this existing cultural and linguistic capital was not recognized and did not afford legitimacy in this field. As international students and ‘non-native’ speakers of English, the teachers expressed disappointment with their subordinated position in the field; they had all offered advice about the content and process of the courses but saw no evidence that their input had shaped what was offered.

The expressed needs of these international students included, for example, wanting the project to take account of and incorporate their local school curricula and text books. UM, however, was intent on selling their product which was premised on a particular approach to teaching English: communicative language teaching with an oral component. Murray\*, a high-level Australian government representative in EA, succinctly encapsulated the dynamics of the field: ‘we [the Australian program] have this product – this is what we will promote – we will do this in spite of what the teachers say they need’. UM had undertaken minimal investigation into the needs of the overseas teachers and Murray’s comment indicates that the Australian government funding agency had no particular interest in pursuing the matter.

**Captials profitable within the fields**A pivotal struggle in both of these case studies centres on who defines the value of capital held by individuals, or perhaps more accurately, the extent to which what is understood as capital in one field is recognised and valued as such in another. The nature of or what constitutes capital is dependent upon the profitability of its practical consequences within the logic of practice of a particular field (Grenfell and James 1998). A resource is therefore only recognized as capital when it holds some symbolic value within a given field; this is what imbues it with legitimacy as a currency of that field and therefore the capacity to denote the position of an individual within it. The logic of practice reflects the interests of a field’s most dominant factions (Grenfell 2007). It is those interests which circumscribe the imposition of symbolic violence and through it the manifestations of the valued capital, and the more readily available or frequently held a resource is or becomes, the more its capital value declines (Bourdieu 1990a).

Economic capital plays a highly significant role in the HE field the world over, and both case studies illustrate the role of economic capital in securing access to and sustaining engagement within it. The UK study in particular highlighted that adequate stocks of economic capital afforded greater opportunity to, for example, secure childcare, purchase learning materials facilitating accessibility, travel freely between home and university and avoid, or at least minimise, the need to displace study time with paid employment (Watson et al 2009). Having gained entry, students in both studies had access to the possibility of accumulating academic and cultural capital that might subsequently be converted to further economic capital.

The concept of cultural capital captures the translation of awareness, conscious or otherwise, of the logic of practice of a field into dispositions to act in particular ways, and it incorporates scarce symbolic goods, skills and titles along with embodied dispositions such as accent, clothing and behaviour (Bourdieu 1991; Moore 2008). Unlike economic capital, which has the potential to be rapidly acquired, for example through a financial windfall, cultural capital is only accumulated over time through exposure to a particular field and the development of a habitus congruent with it (Moore 2008). Clearly illustrating the disputes over what is and is not legitimised as capital is the cultural capital imbued in the original teaching qualifications awarded by host countries in the Australian case study. As an example of symbolic violence imposed by dominant field factions, the Australian providers privilege Australian over local qualifications and in response, the local social context misrecognises (Bourdieu and Passerson 1977 p.xxii) the legitimacy of the power relations at play, seeking out and rewarding Australian over local qualifications.

As the UK study highlighted (Watson 2013), academic capital can be understood as a type of cultural capital that encapsulates the nuanced forms of academic skills and knowledge valued in its students by a particular field or sub-field, which logically translates into academic attainment. Similarly, linguistic capital is noted to encompass aspects of the form and content of language valued within the field including, for example, grammar, linguistic repertoire, forms of phraseology, and the tone, mode and style of written and verbal expression (Bourdieu 1991; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). The legitimised characteristics of these varieties of cultural capital within a field further illustrate the imposition of symbolic violence. Inequality is reinforced by the primacy afforded the particular forms held by those in the most dominant field positions, the arbitrary nature of which is veiled by the suggestion of naturally arising and self-evidently superior characteristics and behaviours (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

With a recognised impact on the efficacy of pedagogic communication ([Bourdieu and Passeron 1977](#_ENREF_2)), the UK study identified a clear and important relationship between linguistic and academic capital: the former influenced the accessibility of the latter, particularly when there was a significant difference between the linguistic capital deployed by staff as more dominant voices in the field and that of individual students (Watson 2013). Variations in participants’ portfolios of linguistic capital shaped their engagement with various learning activities. It influenced individuals’ abilities to interpret learning outcomes and marking criteria, to think using language, to question and develop concepts and ideas, to present knowledge and understanding in a ‘legitimate’ form, and ultimately the positional tendencies and ‘success’ of these individuals within the field.

The field of international EL education is bounded by the rhetoric of partnership, collaboration and the value of the host country’s skills, knowledge and contributions, so it might be assumed that bilingual participants would hold linguistic capital capable of positioning them comfortably within this particular field. Reflecting the interests of the dominant field factions however, it was English, not participants’ mother tongues, that was valued and afforded status as legitimate linguistic capital, and the value of this capital was far greater for native speakers of English. Symbolic violence pervades the discussion of UM’s work, particularly in recognising that the foundations of both projects delegitimise the host country’s teaching practices. It is possible to see clearly how uneven, stratified field relations are maintained in the microcosm that is ELT, and how the interests of the dominant faction are realised and reinforced.

Underlining the notion that capitalbegets capital (Bourdieu 1988), the data from the UK study illustrate the extent to which non-traditional entrants to the HE field were able to draw upon existing stocks of capitalto facilitate the development and extension of other relevant forms. The volume and composition of individual portfolios of capitalwere, in keeping with Bourdieu’s premise, reflected in the different positions and trajectories of participants within the field (Watson et al 2009, Watson 2013), and Tracey’s story clearly illustrates the impact of symbolic violence upon an individual and the possibilities that are available to them. The findings raise questions about the extent to which widening participation policies can achieve their ambitions when the dominant culture and practices of the HE field are so well-established and naturally oriented towards the preservation and privilege of the most powerful factions. Despite actively pursuing the widening participation agenda in the UK over many years, participation amongst those groups specifically targeted by government policies is unevenly distributed across the sector, with under-representation persisting in the most selective and prestigious institutions (BIS 2010).

As a well-established and powerful field, HE can be slow to change (Read et al 2003) and social mobility is not easy to achieve (Milburn 2012). Although difficult to envisage in the UK given current policy and recent fundamental changes to the sector, if there genuinely is an ambition to enhance social inclusion and mobility, such a vision must be vigorously pursued by successive governments over protracted time-frames, regardless of their own ambitions for distinction. As Bourdieu observed ([1999 p.423](#_ENREF_1)), even the apparent success of graduating from HE is not equally beneficial to all individuals in all circumstances (see for example, David et al 2010; Ross 2003). Consideration must therefore be given to ‘success’ not simply in terms of completion or even academic award, but to the capitals that students are able to accrue and the degree to which they hold their value and are transposable into other fields.

Australian universities’ quest for economic capital, coupled with the increasing demand of EL on a worldwide scale, provides fertile conditions for increasing recruitment of international students in this discipline. The practices inherent in this work are, as we have noted, governed by the dominant ideas and theories of the time, and so conserve rather than challenge the positions of the dominant groups. Both projects explored in the case study were awarded on the basis of UM’s reputation in the ELT field and Australia’s perceived experience of and success in teaching within linguistically and culturally diverse settings. In each project, the design of teacher education programs and courses emanated directly from those already delivered by UM. In this context, and given their subordinated position in the field, it is highly unlikely that localised host country knowledge or practices will achieve a position enabling them to reshape the existing dominant culture in which legitimacy is bestowed on the knowledge held and practices of native speakers of English. The range of ‘knowledges’ existing between the dominant and the dominated will almost certainly never come to represent capitals of equal value and the field will therefore continue to deny recognition to indigenous practices.

**Conclusion**

The HE fields of the UK and Australia are subject to the vagaries of changing political climates and are beset by wide ranging contradictions and sometimes rapidly shifting dynamics between agents. Although emerging from distinct geographical contexts and focusing of different areas of practice, the case studies explored in this paper illustrate the dynamics of fields and the issues of power within them. They demonstrate the capacity of the HE field to adapt to new social conditions, highlighting a key and common issue centring on the subsequent redistribution of capital, or not.

Unchallenged, the logic of practice of the HE field would be unlikely to change dramatically or rapidly, but fields are interrelated and major financial, political or external events, such as the global economic downturn or the restructuring of funding in the UK sector, can generate fundamental shifts in the logic of practice which lead to periods of major transformation and reordering of legitimate processes. Notwithstanding the desire of institutions and/or individuals within them to continue to enhance educational quality and accessibility within such dynamic contexts, dominant factions within the field will continue to be best placed to promote and privilege their own interests. This has the tendency to preserve the nature of valued capitals and so maintain the general status quo of the field. In the on-going struggle for distinction, prestige and position in the field, symbolic violence remains a constant presence and attention needs to focus on who is being subordinated and why, who is able to accrue capital and who is not.

\* pseudonym

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