The Relevance of Barnett's Concept of 'Supercomplexity' in a Construction of Professional Identity in English for Academic Purposes: A Renewed Call for an Engagement with Ideology

It is something of a truism that any definition of 'professionalism' is contentious and certainly not 'as clear cut as commonsense usage may suggest' (Williams, 2008: 534). Further, while the relationship between academe and professionalism is an ambiguous one, the relationship between English for Academic Purposes (EAP), academe and professionalism may be considered more so (Benesch, 2001: ix), especially at present with the increased pressure on Higher Education (HE) institutes due to continued socio-economic changes (Williams: 2008: 533) including the continued withdrawal of government funding, particularly evidenced by the Browne Report (2010). In many ways, EAP units reflect these tensions. They are often perceived, both by other departments and themselves, as 'support' services or 'service English' (Swales, 1989: 79 cited in Benesch, 2001: 53) and EAP teachers are often perceived 'as lower-status members of the academic hierarchy who must win the approval of higher-status content faculty, constructed as "experts"' (Johns, 1990b: 31 cited by Benesch, *ibid*.).

The reason for this focus is that one of the most distinguishing features of EAP is its 'strikingly unengaged' attitude towards issues of ideology (Swales, 1994: 201, cited in Benesch, 2001: ix) – an attitude that is still prevalent today. I will also argue that it is this unwillingness to engage with the theoretical (and specifically with the critical) that has 'contributed to ESP's marginalization in the academy, [and] hinder[ed] its "professionalization as a self-standing field"' (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998, cited by Benesch, 2001: 47).

It is through this lack of engagement with ideology that I will compare EAP's 'pragmatic', non-theoretical 'neutral' position with that of Barnett's concept of 'supercomplexity' where he too adopts a 'neutral' stance and although Barnett's position may seem less relevant today, 'any alternative visions will have to take Barnett's vision into account' (Ross, 2010: 10). In fact, many of the conclusions he reaches are still very pertinent, particularly his demand for teaching to 'create epistemological and ontological disturbance in the minds and *being* of students' [original emphasis] in today's 'unsettling environment' (Barnett, 2000: 154). By examining Barnett's position of 'neutrality' and

views on criticality I hope to show is that there is no such thing as 'neutrality' either in theoretical constructs or in our everyday 'commonsense' language. Ideology is all pervasive, as power is 'always already there' (Foucault, 1980: 141), and thus 'all teaching is ideological' (Benesch, 2001: 46).

Thus, the issue of criticality is not so much a search for an unobtainable 'neutrality', but rather a much more complex process as outlined by Barnett, involving such processes as engaging with 'revolutionary' research that questions 'the existing pillars of knowledge' and conveying this to students through a pedagogy that engages students with philosophical/critical theory (as Gramsci, 1971, cited in Andrews and Edwards, 2008: 4, argues); the lecturer using their research to inform their pedagogy and adopting an 'outsider' position requiring great flexibility of thought both on the part of the lecturer *and* the students who must be engaged in a more democratic dialogue. But more than this, critical thinking should become part of the lecturer's and student's being so that it becomes a revolution of the mind, a liberatory experience, making students *and* lecturers 'REALLY' think (Žižek, cited in Rancière, 2004: 74, original emphasis).