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## *Special Issue*

# Critical Perspectives on Neoliberalism in Second/Foreign Language Education

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Emily A. Hellmich, University of California, Berkeley

Noah Katznelson, University of California, Berkeley

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## **GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE**

I am delighted to introduce this fifth special issue of *L2 Journal*, titled *Critical Perspectives on Neoliberalism in Second/Foreign Language Education*, guest-edited by five doctoral students from UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Education: Katie Bernstein, Emily Hellmich, Noah Katznelson, Jaran Shin, and Kimberly Vinall. The impetus for this special issue was an inspiring talk given on Oct. 2012 at the Berkeley Language Center by Prof. Marnie Holborow from the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies at the Dublin City University in Dublin, Ireland. Her talk was titled "Enhancing human capital? Language and the neoliberal university." The talk could not have been better timed. To the dismay of much of the Berkeley faculty, UC Berkeley—the first public university in the country—was embarking on an ambitious program called "Operational Excellence." This program was to develop strategies to drastically cut budgets, raise students' tuition, streamline all administrative services, and ultimately attract corporate sponsors to provide the financial support needed to keep the University afloat, since only 12% of its budget was covered by the State of California, and it was in terrible financial straits. The university was starting to be run like a corporation, and Marnie Holborow's presentation really hit home. Inspired by the talk, five doctoral students decided to form a research group to further study the neoliberal practices that were going on at their own institution and around the world.

In March 2014, three of them organized a colloquium at the Annual Meeting of AAAL in Portland, Oregon titled "Neoliberalism and its impact on language, research, and learning" to which they invited Prof. Holborow. Marnie's contribution "Creeping linguistic neoliberalism in the university: Interpretations and effects" was echoed by Kimberly, Emily, and Jaran's contribution "Critical reflections on becoming researchers in the age of neoliberalism." They showed with great personal conviction and a good deal of concern how neoliberalism altered the research questions they posed, transformed the theories they used, and affected the construction of their subjectivities as young researchers. Based on the papers presented at that colloquium and some thirty others who enthusiastically responded to the Call for Papers, I invited Katie, Emily, Noah, Jaran, and Kimberly to guest-edit a special issue of *L2Journal* on the topic.

The team of guest editors has worked hard, in consultation with me, at selecting the papers, sending them out for review, shepherding them through multiple revisions, copyediting them, and formatting them for publication. The result is, I believe, a unique collection of papers on a topic that should be of concern to all foreign language educators and that loudly calls for our attention. Some language teachers, already overwhelmed with the task of keeping enrollments steady and dealing with the daily demands of their profession, might not recognize themselves in the neoliberal practices described in this special issue; others might not feel these practices have anything to do with them. But none can be indifferent to what neoliberalism is doing to higher education. As young scholars committed to social justice and about to go out on the job market, our guest editors are particularly sensitive to the geopolitical developments that are bound to affect all of us in some way at some point. We do well to listen to what they are saying.

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