Introducing the project
This poster represents a major paper from UBC’s LLED 510: Language, Discourse, and Identity. I was curious to see how the work on investment originated by Bonny Norton could be extended to other professional contexts, so I conducted an in-depth conceptual analysis of its applicability to library settings.

What is investment?
Investment is an explanatory construct conceived of as a sociological complement to psychological motivation. It signals the complex relationships between individual identities and the forces of capital and ideology, which mutually inform and affect one another (Norton, 2013).

A key idea is that people invest themselves in a given person, practice, or community because they imagine it to fit with their desired identities, capital, and ideologies. Examining these three factors can help to understand and change the conditions under which people engage with other entities in their social worlds (Norton, 2013). Such entities may easily include libraries and classrooms.

Where does the idea come from?
Investment was first introduced in 1995 by Bonny Norton, who was in turn influenced by poststructuralist critics such as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, cultural theorist Christine Weedon, and historian Benedict Anderson.

Important concepts from these thinkers include:
- language as a social practice
- identity as multiple, shifting, and shaped by language
- identities and communities as imagined constructs

After more than twenty years of ongoing development in the literature on applied linguistics and second-language acquisition, investment is ripe for being decentred from its professional moorings and brought to bear on other fields. The recent model by Darvin and Norton (2015) is especially helpful in this regard.

IDENTITY is multiple, shifting, and negotiated through language between the individual and society.

IDEOLOGY refers to the normative sets of ideas that construct power structures and distributions.

CAPITAL consists of the social, cultural, and economic tokens of power that govern social functions.

INVESTMENT occurs when people relate to their concept of a given person, practice, or community because it aligns with their imagined identities, their desires for access to capital, and the wider ideologies that affect them.

What is the value of investment?
Actively considering how investment plays out in context offers several benefits. An investment approach:
- challenges views of individuals as solely responsible for their motivations and behavior
- articulates and critically engages with the roles of surrounding social forces
- highlights the role of language as a social practice that shapes and maintains those forces
- explains more about behavior by including the complexities of social contexts
- improves outcomes in real-world situations

How can it be used in libraries?
The investment approach can be used wherever we seek to increase identification and engagement with the library: in collections, programming, instruction, general use, and more. To support investment, we must describe and perhaps change library practices where they shape interactions among identity, capital, and ideology. Determining how identities are represented, how access to capital occurs, and how ideologies include or exclude can then “create a space in which learners are not by default marginalized or resistant, but where they have an agentic capacity to evaluate and negotiate the constraints and opportunities of their social location” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47).

Selected references

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