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The role of ELT in promoting social justice

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Outline

- Brief Background - current global and local trends of increased conflict and social injustice
- Some Insights from English Language policies & practices in international contexts regarding perspectives on social justice
- Opportunities in ELT to encourage goodwill, understanding and social change
- Exemplifying localized ELT materials designed in Bangladesh.
- Their application in raising perspectives on social justice among local teachers.

Current global and local trends of increasing conflict and social injustice

- Widespread human suffering and persecution
- Through political divisiveness, oppression, economic agenda, discrimination and social injustice
- Structural factors such as poverty, powerlessness, illiteracy, ill-health and other injustices or inequalities
- Resulting in global/regional/local conflict, inequities and injustices - discrimination, marginalization or even outright exclusion.

Some Insights from English Language Teaching policies & practices

Some of English Language teaching literature indicate that there is a potential that English may be used to promote peace building and social justice.

3 Examples:

- Le Bianco (2011) - Srilanka
- Whitehead (2011) – Democratic Republic of Congo
- Capstick & Delaney (2016): The Refugee Crisis in Europe

Summary of indications:

- Claims are being made that English has the potential for handling dispute and improve human security systems.
- English has been and is used as a medium for peace and reconciliation in some parts of the world.
- English has some potential to open opportunities for peaceful resolution and social change.

Opportunities in ELT to encourage understanding and social change

Rising lobby in the ELT profession for:
promoting intercultural understanding and
empathy, resilience and reconciliation
(Arikana 2009, Birch 2009).

“RE-Locating TESOL”

Edge (2006): strongly encouraged initiatives for ‘re-locating TESOL’ by emphasizing on two specific issues:

- the *importance of context*
- a *respect for difference*

May be applied in 2 ways in ELT

- In Materials Design
- In Teacher Development

Exemplifying local ELT materials designed in Bangladesh

English for Today (for Higher Secondary Schools)

- Multi-strand syllabus, topic-based course book.
- Topic-based units containing short lessons.
- Topics were chosen with relevance to:
the environment, natural disasters, social awareness, social development, human resources, healthy living, gender, disability, human rights, peace and conflict management.

English for Today

Lesson 2

Women have rights too

- *There are some illustrations, each representing a real life situation. Learners are asked to look at the illustrations in pairs/groups. In each case they discuss what they see.*
- *After a surface level description, they are asked to think critically about the situation they see.*
- *In each case, they are then asked questions of power / rights / what rights were being upheld or denied.*

Lesson 2

Women have rights too

Objectives: By the end of the lesson you will have

- looked at some illustrations
- interpreted a table and answered questions based on it
- read a passage and filled in blanks by listening to your teacher
- done an exercise with prefixes
- written an analysis of a diagram

A Look at the following illustrations. Work in pairs. In each case talk about what rights the woman is being denied.

If you don't have a son this time I am going to marry again.

You are getting married this month. You can continue studies if your in-laws wish.

Where is the dowry your father promised? Go get it or don't come back.



B Read the following table and answer the questions that follow.

	Adult literacy rate				Primary school enrolment ratio 1990-1996		Secondary school enrolment ratio 1990-1996	
	1980		1995					
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Bangladesh	41	17	49	26	74	64	28	11

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You are getting married this month. You can continue studies if your in-laws wish.



Where is the dowry
your father promised?
Go get it or don't
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Analysis : Using local contexts to reflect human rights issues

1. Preference for male babies.
2. Putting the onus of the gender of the baby on the mother.
3. Child marriage – denying the rights of the girl child.
4. The widespread social custom of demanding dowry from the wife's family.
5. The humiliation and persecution of the woman if the dowry is not given in full by her family.

Challenges faced

Teachers ingrained perspectives and attitudes:

- Traditional – preserving social hierarchy
- Stereotypical attitudes towards women and the poor
- Lack of compassion, tolerance and respect for the powerless and the weak
- Not really taking the content of these lessons to heart as teachers were more focused on finishing the syllabus and teaching to the exams

The Intended Role of the Teacher in using these course materials in class

- Teachers needed to use these localized materials in an appropriate spirit in order :
 - To create a critical dialogue on these social issues
 - To create awareness of social injustices
 - To create a positive mind set in the learner

Application in Teacher Development

Friedrich (2007) identifies three areas of concentration for linguistic education and social justice in the EFL/ESL classroom:

- a. linguistic and cross-cultural awareness
- b. humanizing vocabulary
- c. peace linguistic education of teachers

'A new linguistic peace model of communicative competence' - Friedrich

The four **communicative competences** (Canale & Swain 1980):

- Grammatical
- Sociolinguistic
- Strategic
- Discoursal

Friedrich (2007) proposes an additional competency – **of promoting peace and social well-being.**

Teachers need to become promoters of positive social well-being

- By understanding how strongly learners are influenced by teachers' behaviour, perceptions and attitudes.
- By discouraging common negative disagreement-fostering language terminology
- By reinforcing positive agreement-fostering terminology in learners.
- By realizing teachers' potential and power to nurture both negative or positive emotions and attitudes in learners.

Final Remarks

- Teachers need to operate as change agents.
- Strong need for curricula, materials, methods and tests to focus not only on accuracy, fluency and appropriateness but also on social awareness and justice.
- Current ELT classrooms require teachers, materials, tasks and methodology to act in synergy in order to produce positive agents of change that may promote harmony between students by fostering respect for difference and inclusiveness within the community

Thank you

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