

Exploring English Language Teaching as Emancipatory Practice

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Things I'd like to focus on

- Power locations and ELT
- A conceptual framework for evaluating educational practice.
- Ways of challenging hegemony and promoting emancipation in ELT

A Critical Perspective

Definition

‘[A] social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to traditional theory oriented only to understanding or explaining it.’

(Wikipedia)

Who to read

- Education:
 - Paolo Freire
 - Henry Giroux
- ELT/Applied Linguistics
 - Alastair Pennycook
 - Norman Fairclough
 - Jane Mulderrig
 - David Block
 - John Gray

The world we live in...

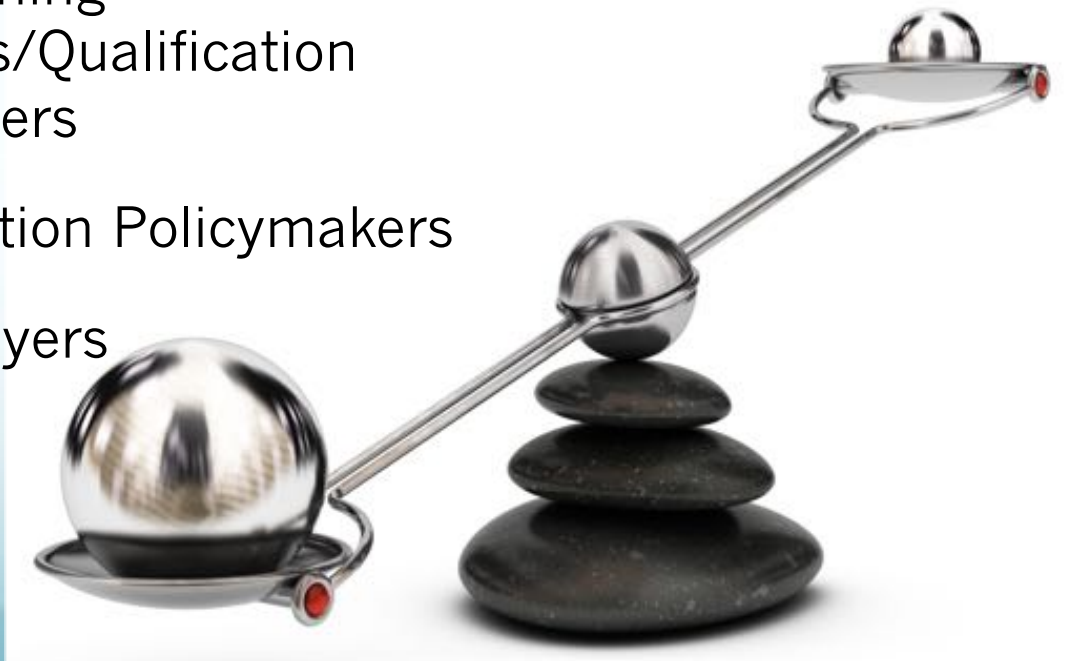


Situating ELT in its Global Context

- ‘[W]e have seen over recent years the increasing commodification and monetisation of all manner of otherwise intangible things’ (Littlejohn 2012: 293).
- ‘[T]he [ELT] industry has grown alongside the consolidation of English as the lingua franca of corporate-driven globalisation’ (Copley 2018: 44)
- ‘Commercial ELT, through its materials and branding, is therefore not merely reflecting a neoliberal zeitgeist, but in many respects is strategically positioned within it’ (Copley 2018: 59).

Locations of Power in ELT

- School Owners/English-Medium Universities
- Publishing/EdTech Companies
- Examining Bodies/Qualification Providers
- Education Policymakers
- Employers
- Teachers
- Students
- ELT Methodologists
- Materials Writers



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ELT – a neoliberal profession

Sounds good...

- aspirational content
- learner autonomy
- global standards
- meticulous planning
- focus on “fun”
- gamification
- empowerment

...but actually...

- Neoliberal values
 - Human Capital Theory
 - individualism
 - selfishness
 - competitiveness
- McDonaldization
 - prescriptiveness
 - censorship
 - disempowerment

(For more see Block et al 2012)

What is the Purpose of English Language Teaching?

- **Education as Censorship/Disempowerment**

*‘White people go to school,
Where they teach you how to be thick.’*
(‘White Riot’ – The Clash)

What is the Purpose of English Language Teaching?

- **Education as Indoctrination/Imperialism**

‘...imposing a “majority” agenda on...”minority” communities’

(Cheong et al 2007: 42)

What is the Purpose of English Language Teaching?

- **Education as Empowerment**

‘...people developing capacities to act successfully within the existing system and structures of power’

(Inglis 1997: 4).

What is the Purpose of English Language Teaching?

- **Education as Emancipation**

‘...the creation of an informed, critical citizenry capable of participating and governing in a democratic society.’

(Giroux 2011: 7)

The Emancipation Continuum

Developed from ideas presented in a study by Worthman (2008):

‘The positioning of adult learners: appropriating learner experience on the continuum of empowerment to emancipation’

International Journal of Lifelong Education, 27: 4, pp. 443-462.

Impact of these attitudes



Disempowerment

Prescriptive
Materials imported and imposed
Tasks focus on the mundane and inoffensive
Teacher dispenses knowledge



Indoctrination/Imperialism

Prescriptive
Materials direct student activity
Tasks reinforce normative behaviour
Teacher dispenses knowledge



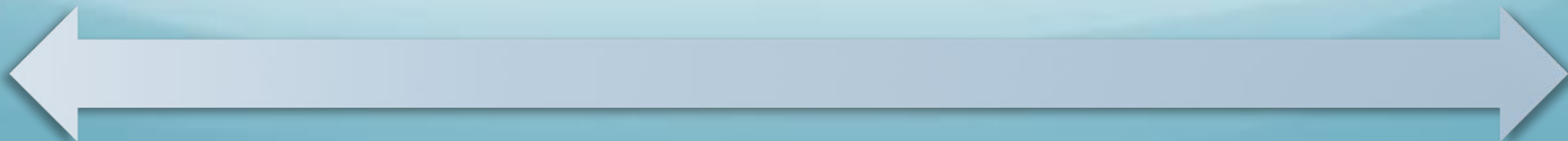
Empowerment

Needs-based
Materials develop skills for life/work/study
Tasks prioritize real-world content
Teacher dispenses knowledge



Emancipation

Co-created
Materials often generated by students
Tasks develop critical thinking skills
Learning is multi-directional



A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the center is an open, lined notebook with the text 'What to do?' written in large, bold, black cursive. To the top left of the notebook are five pens in yellow, brown, red, blue, and green. Above the pens is a yellow sticky note and a clear stapler. To the right of the notebook is a black calculator. To the left is a black tablet. In the top right corner is a green mug filled with dark coffee.

What
to do?

Common questions used when evaluating ELT practice

- Did you achieve your aims?
- Did the learners use the language you wanted them to?
- Did you generate sufficient interest in the topic?
- Did you follow your plan?
- Did you use a range of tasks and interaction patterns?
- Did you clarify the language effectively?
- Do you have a good rapport with your class?

Alternative Questions

- Who benefits most from this lesson?
- What underlying values and assumptions exist within the lesson content?
- How (if at all) does this lesson address issues of injustice or inequality?
- What impact (if any) does this lesson have on the wider world?
- What worldview and values are you promoting with this lesson?

Pushing ELT along the continuum

Obstacles

- Profit orientation
- Linear, predetermined syllabus
- “Banking” methodologies
- Linguistic outcomes
- Internationally accredited outcomes
- Bland, generic topics
- “Apolitical” institutions

What would work better

- Education as top priority
- Co-creation of syllabus, content and outcomes
- Participatory methodologies
- Non-linguistic outcomes
- Topics that challenge beliefs and focus on social justice
- Institutions acknowledge education as political activism

Pushing ELT along the continuum

Institutions

- Apply SLA theory to curriculum design.
- Take a more critical approach to materials selection.
- Use more localised materials.
- Localised CPD, not just global TESOL qualifications.
- Exploit the “21st century skills” agenda.
- Bring critical thinking into assessment.

Teachers

- Serve up more PARSNIPs.
- Tap into alternative sources of motivation.
- Don't be afraid of “cans of worms”.
- Include space for co-creation.
- Encourage reflection on societal positioning and underlying reasons.
- Collaborative project work with real transformative impact.

Call it out!



ELT as Emancipatory Practice: an Example



A General English course for adults in a non-English speaking country.

Syllabus:

- Negotiated between teacher and students, based on an initial needs analysis and regular “reflection on progress” sessions.

Example Topics/Themes:

- “Social problems in our community”, “Discrimination in the workplace”.

Example Tasks:

- “Make a list of things the government could do to reduce obesity”.
- “Write a letter to your political representative suggesting solutions to a problem in your local community.”

Assessment:

- An investigative project involving individual research and a group presentation on a topic of local or global significance.

Summary

- External influences mean that in most contexts, ELT is used to stifle freedoms and reinforce hegemony.
- The Emancipation Continuum can help us to identify the extent to which our practice is complicit in promoting inequality and injustice.
- The only way to address issues of social injustice and inequality is to take a critical, transformative and emancipatory approach to education.
- There are ways for institutions and individuals in ELT to challenge existing power structures and promote emancipation.

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