The Emancipation Continuum

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IATEFL Global Issues/Pronunciation SIG Conference
October 2017

Things I'll cover

- Explore some ideas expressing different attitudes to English, ELT, and English language learners.

- Explore limitations in our evaluation of ELT practice.

- Presentation of a framework for analysing ELT practice.

- Discuss some examples and apply the framework.

- Draw some conclusions.

Exploring our attitudes...

Why do people need to learn English?

A. So they can help to meet the needs of an increasingly English-speaking, globalized economy.

B. So they can be more successful in an increasingly English-speaking, globalized world.

C. So they can become actively engaged in making the world a better place.

What do we expect learners to do with the English we teach them?

A. Whatever is required by English-speaking employers and/or educational institutions.

B. Make progress in their careers/studies and become more successful.

C. Engage with global society so they can help to transform it for the better.

What is the role of ELT?

A. To teach the English language – no more, no less.

B. To give learners language skills that allow them to become more successful in life.

C. To encourage learners to critically engage with global issues so they can help to make things better.

What topics should an English course include?

A. Topics that educate people about Western values.

B. Topics that help people to become more successful in their own context.

C. Topics that allow people to become aware of injustices and look for solutions.

What ELT materials should we use?

A. Materials produced by global corporations – they're obviously the best quality.

B. Materials designed to meet the needs of specific learners.

C. Materials that address issues of injustice and inequality.

What makes a good English language teacher?

A. Someone who can manage a class effectively and teach what's in the syllabus.

B. Someone who is sensitive to learner needs and adapts their teaching to address these needs.

C. Someone who considers the impact of their practice on the wider world.

Feedback

- Mostly As?

ELT for the status quo

- Mostly Bs?

ELT for the benefit of learners

- Mostly Cs?

ELT for global justice and equity

Common questions used when evaluating ELT practice

- Did you achieve your aims?

- Did the learners use the language you wanted them to?

- Were the learners interested in the lesson?

- 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?

Are these the right questions?

- 'Lifelong learning…is developing as a regime of truth that signifies changes in the exercise of power in the social order. And it is resulting in technicist and decontextualised practices of teaching and learning that marginalise central questions of pedagogy and curriculum in adult education discourse.'

(Edwards 2007: 81-82)

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- Did you clarify the language effectively?

- Do you have a good rapport with your class?

Questions we don't ask when evaluating ELT practice

- 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 are you promoting with this lesson?

Where is the power in ELT?

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employers?

publishers?

examining bodies?

NNS governments?

English-medium universities?

school owners?

NS gov't bodies?

global franchises?

teachers?

students?

How do power locations influence our practice?

- Programme design

- Outcomes

- Choice of materials

- CPD

- Methods

- Employment practice and the NS myth

- Global use of English

ELT: Possible Roles

- **Imperialism/Dominance and Indoctrination**

'…the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages' (Phillipson 1992: 47).

- **Empowerment and Individualism**

'…people developing capacities to act successfully within the existing system and structures of power' (Inglis 1997: 4).

- **Emancipation and Social Transformation**

'…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.

The emancipation continuum

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Disempowerment

"Don't learn anything that might allow you to upset the status quo."

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Indoctrination/Imperialism

"Learn so you can do what is expected of you."

The emancipation continuum

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"Don't learn anything that might allow you to upset the status quo."

Indoctrination/Imperialism

"Learn so you can do what is expected of you."

Empowerment

"Learn how to succeed within existing societal/power structures."

The emancipation continuum

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"Don't learn anything that might allow you to upset the status quo."

Indoctrination/Imperialism

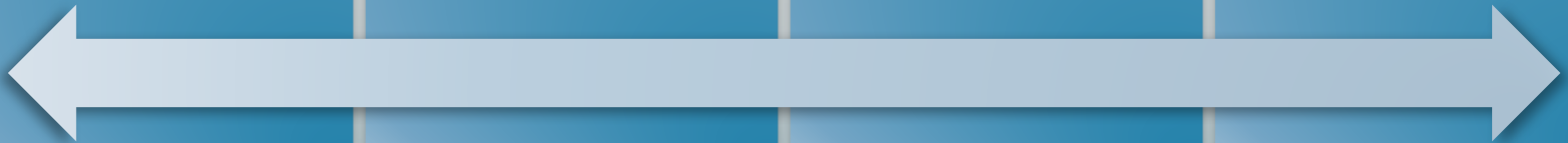"Learn so you can do what is expected of you."

Empowerment

"Learn how to succeed within existing societal/power structures."

Emancipation

"Critically evaluate current structures and practices with a view to effecting change."

This slide has been left blank to give you a moment to reflect on what has been covered so far.

But I'm just an English teacher!

The myth of neutrality

'Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.'
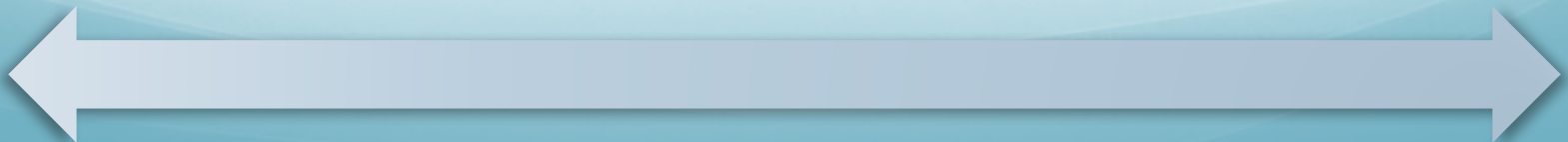
(Freire 1995: 122)

Voicing your reflections

- Where would you place your own attitudes on the emancipation continuum?

- What is your institution's approach to ELT? Where on the continuum might it sit? Are your own attitudes in line with those of your institution?

- How do your learners regard themselves? What type of approach to ELT do they expect, and what would benefit them the most? Are those things the same?

How do different attitudes towards ELT impact on...

- ...programme design?

- ...programme content/materials?

- ...tasks/activities?

- ...the role of the English language teacher?

Impact of these attitudes
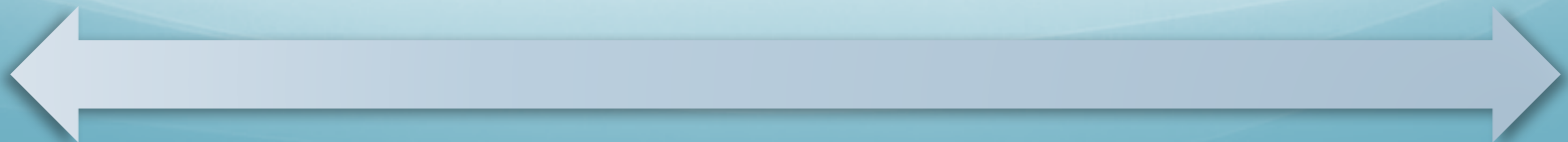
Impact of these attitudes

Disempowerment

Prescriptive

Materials imported from an external source

Tasks focus on the mundane and inoffensive

Teacher dispenses knowledge

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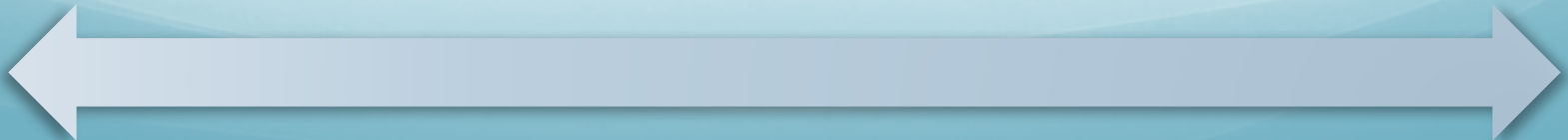
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Materials direct student activity

Tasks reinforce normative behaviour

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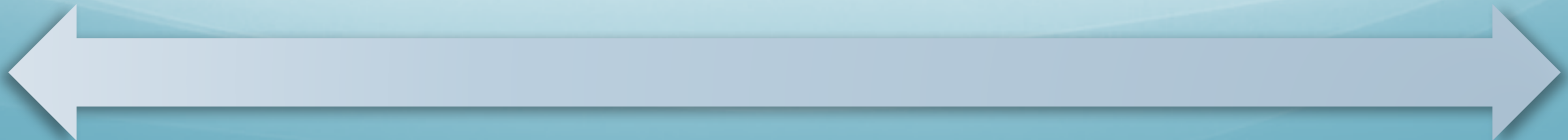
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Empowerment

Needs-based

Materials develop skills for life/work/study

Tasks prioritize real-world content

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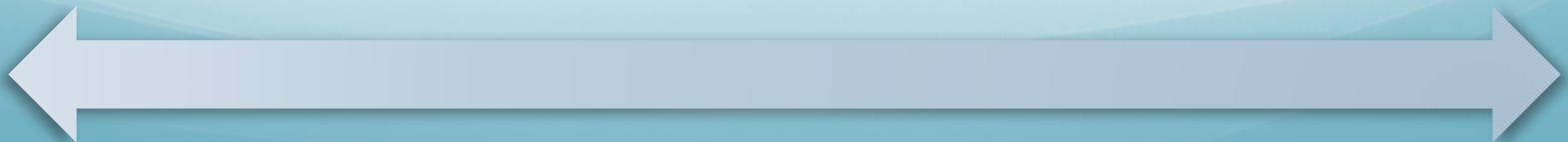Tasks prioritize real-world content

Teacher dispenses knowledge

Emancipation

Co-created

Materials often generated by students

Tasks develop critical thinking skills

Learning is multi-directional

Some examples…

Where on the continuum?

A foundation course at an English-medium university.

Syllabus:
- Designed by the teacher after conducting a needs analysis at the beginning of the course.

Example Topics/Themes:
- "Technology in academic research", "How to structure an essay".

Example Tasks:
- "Find credible online sources to support your argument".
- "Listen to the talk and make notes of the main points".

Assessment:
- An individual project leading to a 1000-word essay.

Where on the continuum?

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

Syllabus:

- Based on a global coursebook, published in the UK and which sequences language according to linguistic complexity.

Example Topics/Themes:

- "In the home", "Sport and Leisure", "Transport and Travel".

Example Tasks:

- "Write an email to a friend about your favourite place".
- "Talk to your partner about how long it takes you to pack your suitcase".
- "Fill in the gaps using the correct tense."

Assessment:

- A grammar and vocabulary test, provided in the teacher's book.

Where on the continuum?

A Business English course for employees of a large international company, provided by a private language school.

Syllabus:

- Designed by the school's DoS after discussions with the employer.

Example Topics/Themes:

- "Health and Safety", "Attending Meetings", "Writing Reports".

Example Tasks:

- "Listen to the recording. Find examples of how the speakers show agreement or disagreement.
- "Use the information in the table to write a report for your manager".

Assessment:

- A largely skills-based assessment designed by the school's DoS.

Where on the continuum?

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 individual project leading to a group presentation on a topic of local or global significance.

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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

Summary

- ELT can be used to address inequalities, but can also be used to stifle freedoms and reinforce hegemony.

- There is a lack of discussion among ELT professionals about the wider impact of our practice.

- If we want ELT to be emancipatory, we must first establish the extent to which our practice is complicit in promoting inequality and injustice.

- The emancipation continuum may provide a framework for doing this.

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