Introduction: why a critical perspective matters

In the 1980s and 1990s, EAP took a ‘critical turn’, following parallel developments in the wider English language training (ELT) community as writers and practitioners in the field of English language teaching increasingly began to consider the overall political and social implications of their profession. For example, Phillipson (1992) and Crystal (1998) explored the impact of English as a world language and the role the English language teaching industry played in its spread, while other writers explored the question of the English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher’s identity, and the question whether native or non-native speakers would be the most effective English language teachers (Medgyes, 1992). Critical EAP (CEAP) broadened this investigation to include theories (and practices) that develop a social science of EAP teaching by revealing its hidden politics. Critical perspectives provide the EAP profession with space to reflect on the wider social and political implications of what happens in classrooms, thus enabling greater self-awareness for the practitioner and their role in the academy and society as a whole.

Until the late 1980s, EAP was seen by many of its practitioners as an essentially neutral and a-political field of practice (Benesch, 1993). According to Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002), EAP was largely focussed on responding to the needs of academic disciplines and had not concerned itself with the wider socio-cultural implications of how EAP was implemented and for what ends. CEAP instead sought to challenge mainstream EAP and what it saw as an ‘accommodationist’ position that EAP had fallen into; that is, one that was value neutral, pragmatic and accommodating of existing power relations in the classroom, academia and society overall (Benesch, 1993, p. 714). CEAP, thus, emerged as a coherent and effective critique of mainstream EAP during the 1990s, as Pennycook (1997, 1999) and Benesch (1993, 1996, 2001) made a highly persuasive case that EAP was a political field of practice, whether ‘accommodationist’ practitioners were aware of it or not. Thus, the core contribution of CEAP to the EAP profession was to encourage and at times provoke teachers, writers and managers to engage with the wider consequences of their practice.

However, despite its critical stance, CEAP avoided any serious critique of its own beliefs and practices. In this, CEAP mirrored the wider critical pedagogy movement, which also seemed reluctant to subject itself to the forms of critical engagement ‘to which it subjects...
others’ (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 220). This potentially creates problems for EAP professionals who want to be reflective and politically engaged in their practice.

This chapter will start by providing an outline of CEAP’s development, from critical pedagogy to Benesch’s adaptation of this to EAP, which I term ‘first wave’ CEAP. In doing so, I set out the political history of EAP as it moved from a false neutrality to an appreciation of its highly political role. I will then consider the crisis of first wave CEAP and its failure to recognise its own potential for (ideological) hegemony, which presents significant dilemmas for EAP professionals. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the potential for a CEAP revival in a ‘second wave’ that relocates CEAP within local practices.

The ideological evolution of CEAP: from critical theory to critical EAP

CEAP believes the teaching of EAP to be inextricably bound up with questions of power, ideology and social justice. Indeed, the critical perspective is a transformative one that sees the classroom as a place where hegemonic power can, and should, be challenged by both teachers and students. CEAP shares these concerns with the wider critical pedagogy movement, which it grew out of. Critical pedagogy has in turn been heavily influenced by critical theory, which emerged as an intellectual approach in the first half of the twentieth century.

Critical theory developed out of the work of the Frankfurt School led by German academics Adorno, Horkheimer and, later, Habermas. The Frankfurt School drew on orthodox Marxist thought to develop its own critique of capitalism, which argued that the conventional Marxist critique, with its focus on the material world and its dismissal of ideas as mere superstructure, was insufficient (Giroux, 2009, p. 37). For critical theorists, the realms of ideas and culture were of vital importance as they had become the means by which twentieth-century capitalism exercised power and control (Giroux, 2009, p. 37). Gramsci’s work on how capitalism exercised hegemony through the transmission of a dominant ideology further contributed to the emergence of a critical approach, which argued that capitalist oppression could also be resisted through the realm of ideas and culture (Gramsci, 1992). Thus, for critical theorists like Habermas, education has a ‘critical potential’ to become a route to emancipation from oppression rooted in the capitalist system (Young, 1989, p. 45).

In the 1960s, the work and writings of Paulo Freire gave coherence and momentum to what would later be termed critical pedagogy (Darder et al., 2009). Freire, a Brazilian educator and intellectual, rose to prominence in the early 1960s with literacy programmes he initiated while part of the faculty of Recife University (Weiler, 1996, pp. 358–359). Among adherents to critical pedagogy, Freire continues to be regarded as the ‘most influential educational philosopher’ (Darder et al., 2009, p. 5).

For critical pedagogues like Freire, the classroom and curriculum are more than just a place and programme of study; rather, they are sites where power is exercised and students prepared for their roles in a capitalist society (McLaren, 2009, pp. 74–75). Freire (1994) criticises a transmission approach in which the teacher merely ‘deposits’ ideas without communicating with students. Students, who may be able to ‘read’ letters and words, may not understand the meaning of what they read. For example, critical pedagogy notes that ELT materials are products of commercial publishers operating in a liberal capitalist system. These materials celebrate but do not challenge its values, such as individualism, economic success and a globalised outlook. The non-critical teacher has no space to consider the social and political implications of the material (e.g. the implications for
workers in the developed world due to the relocation of companies to the developing world, and the implications for workers in the developing world, including precarious, underpaid and dangerous working conditions). Instead, the teacher focusses on language, disregarding that grammar and vocabulary are choices of meaning, and that language is, therefore, fundamentally political.

Critical pedagogy argues, therefore, that there is a ‘hidden curriculum’ that serves to reproduce and reinforce existing power relationships in society (McLaren, 2009, p. 75). Thus, the dominant hegemonic ideology of liberal capitalism is supported through the education system. However, while the classroom is a site of domination, it is also a place of potential liberation. Critical pedagogy is ultimately a ‘pedagogy of hope’ (Freire, 1994) where students can be made conscious of their oppression, and where they can be enabled to challenge the hegemonic ideology (McLaren, 2009). Thus, for critical pedagogues, schooling must be partisan, challenging the existing hegemony and working towards a ‘society based on non-exploitative relations and social justice’ (McLaren, 2009, p. 62). It is this focus on a ‘pedagogy of hope’ where the classroom is a place of potential liberation, that has had a direct influence on CEAP, in particular Benesch (2001) and the generation of CEAP scholars influenced by her work (see Grey, 2009; Chun, 2009; Le Ha, 2009; Morgan, 2009; Appleby 2009). Like the wider critical pedagogy movement, the ‘dream’ of critical EAP is that critical practices in the classroom can lead to ‘reforms in academic institutions’ and improved ‘conditions in the workplace and community’ (Benesch, 2001, p. xviii).

From EAP’s alleged neutrality to CEAP’s critical intervention and the politics of resistance

CEAP developed when writers and practitioners began to apply the ideas of critical pedagogy to the teaching of English for academic purposes on university campuses. The application of a critical perspective to EAP initially drew on critical approaches to the teaching of English to immigrants in the US, and composition writing in American high schools and colleges. Benesch, perhaps the most prominent CEAP writer, emphasised that, like other areas of pedagogy, English language teaching is not a politically neutral activity (Benesch, 1993), and that EAP professionals needed to ‘recognise the ideological forces at work’ in their ‘institutional sites’ and ‘pedagogies’ (1989, quoted in Benesch, 1993, p. 708). According to Benesch (1993), the EAP curriculum, as traditionally conceived, was highly political: in not questioning existing power structures, it was implicated in supporting and maintaining the status quo. EAP tutors who avoided discussing or acknowledging the presence of ideology were not neutral. Indeed, Benesch accused EAP practitioners who ignored the political implications of their work of adopting an ‘accommodationist ideology’ (1993, p. 711) that accepted the status quo as correct.

In her call for a critical approach to EAP, Benesch thus challenged Santos’ claim that L2 instruction and writing is pragmatic and non-ideological (Santos, 1992). Santos had argued that as a branch of applied linguistics research into L2 composition is primarily descriptive and quantitative in nature, and thus it is above the politics of language (1992, p. 8). According to Santos, the primary goal of EAP – preparing students for a course in higher education – meant that teaching EAP was a pragmatic, non-political exercise (1992, p. 9). The focus is on learning language (i.e. words and grammar), not the understanding and questioning of content. Benesch instead argued that EAP instruction involves choices over what to teach and how to teach it, and in this process decisions will invariably be made that either challenge or support the status quo (Benesch, 1993, p. 714).
As the decade progressed, Benesch sought to develop CEAP as a coherent and practical approach to EAP teaching. The key move was to set out how CEAP could be implemented through the curriculum and in the classroom. Benesch argued that CEAP had to move from a needs analysis approach to what she termed a ‘rights analysis’ approach (Benesch, 1999, p. 313). Benesch noted that the problem with the traditional needs analysis is that it focusses on what the institution, and wider capitalist society, wants from the student, making student needs ‘subordinate’ (Benesch, 1996, p. 724), and therefore accepting of the status quo. For example, while the non-critical, accommodationist teacher would use a marketing text to teach language and text formats used in marketing without questioning the ethics of marketing, the critical teacher would use the same material to lead students to question the text’s assumptions and consider alternative views to those presented in the material. Benesch, thus, used a critical needs analysis, or rights analysis, which starts from the position that students typically ‘are entitled to more power than they have’, and that students need to be given the means to question and challenge existing power relationships within their institution and discipline. Therefore, students are not merely passive subjects to be shaped to meet the needs of the academy; rather, they are reconstructed as ‘potentially active participants’ (Benesch, 1999, p. 315).

Central to Benesch’s (1996) approach was to connect the classroom and curriculum to the wider social and political world her students inhabited, shaping the course to the needs of the student. With the cooperation of a colleague teaching psychology, Benesch sought to develop a more critical approach to her students’ subjects and how they were taught. In connecting her EAP classroom to the wider political and social world her students lived in, she discussed issues such as anorexia and domestic violence in her psychology preparation class. Benesch invited students to share their own experiences of anorexia and domestic violence, allowing them to expose both their own vulnerabilities, their own (moral) positions on these issues, as well as considering the implications of these issues in broader social terms. Her goal was to challenge assumptions and prejudices held by students, guiding discussion with her expertise.

Following Benesch’s development of CEAP’s theory and practice, a debate between Pennycook and Allison regarding CEAP’s ideological foundation was another key intervention in the development of CEAP during the 1990s. Allison had attempted a rearguard action on behalf of EAP’s claims to neutrality. He agreed that EAP teachers should be politically aware but that a pragmatic approach that would not distract from the business of actually teaching EAP should take priority (1998, p. 314). Pennycook countered Allison’s (like Santos’) argument that many EAP practitioners were already engaged with the wider social world, stating that it was insufficient to provide students with the critical education they needed if EAP were not to become another means of reinforcing the status quo (Pennycook, 1997, p. 256). Pennycook rejected the idea that EAP is, or should be, a ‘neutral service industry’ (1997, p. 263). Instead, he widened the attack on the alleged neutrality of EAP to argue that neither universities nor the English language itself were neutral (Pennycook, 1997, pp. 257–261). Thus, Pennycook argued that higher education institutions, and indeed EAP programmes, are themselves political sites where hegemonic ideologies are either reproduced and reinforced or resisted (Pennycook, 1997, p. 262).

This process of research, reflection and publication led by Benesch and Pennycook culminated at the start of the next decade in Benesch’s book Critical English for Academic Purposes: Theory, Politics, and Practice (2001). After providing a critical history of EAP and reaffirming the emancipatory goals of CEAP, Benesch more fully set out the ideological inspiration for CEAP. Benesch (2001, pp. 49–60) claimed Freire as her main influence,
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with important contributions from Foucault and feminist authors such as Weiler. The book restated the need for EAP units to assert themselves within the academy, and gave further examples of how a critical approach to EAP could be implemented in the classroom. The book served to consolidate and give coherence to the previous decade’s developments, and became an important starting point for critical researchers and practitioners (see Edge, 2006; Grey, 2009; Chun, 2009 and Le Ha, 2009).

Therefore, by the start of the new millennium, CEAP had emerged as another evolution of the critical pedagogy movement, engaging with the particular context of teaching English for academic purposes. This first wave of CEAP had, thus, opened up space for teachers, materials writers and researchers to be ever more reflective as to the ‘why’ of what they did. Following this, between 2001 and 2009, CEAP took a much more political turn, away from a focus on pedagogy. This was a time of heightened activism and a full-blooded engagement with a politics of resistance to the status quo as CEAP writers and practitioners responded to wider political events such as the American-led war on terror, the Iraq War and the advance of globalised capitalism. These events seemed to intensify the need for a critical approach, and made CEAP writers even more overtly political than before. CEAP’s ideological foundation in critical theory and the Frankfurt School’s engagement with Marxist analysis emphasised that CEAP was not merely a theory of pedagogy but a social science of teaching in which the classroom exists as part of society.

For Edge (2006, p. xiii), and other CEAP writers, the 2003 Iraq invasion by US President George Bush was a ‘catalytic defining moment’ that was a reminder that the politics of English language teaching – the language of the powerful, here the allies that invaded Iraq – cannot be ignored. It renewed and intensified the concerns of CEAP that the practice of EAP, and ELT in general, played a key role as a ‘support for the status quo’ and the ‘dominance of the US and its allies’ (Edge, 2006, p. xiii). Edge was even more direct when he argued that ELT served now to ‘facilitate the policies the tanks were sent in to impose’ (2004, p. 718).

Kumaravadivelu (2006) argued that there was a colonial dimension to English language instruction and that it helped to facilitate consent for American-led capitalism. This neo-imperialism is also linked to globalisation and its negative consequences as it reinforces the dominant position of the US and the forces of capitalism. According to Kumaravadivelu, English language teaching is fully implicated in this process. Indeed, by the end of the decade globalisation and its negative consequences had become central to much of the CEAP movement. Benesch argued that in fact globalisation had become the very ‘rationale for critical EAP’ (2009, p. 81). Globalisation was such ‘fertile ground’ for CEAP because it increased inequalities and widened the gap between those who had power and those who did not (Benesch, 2009). This came into increasingly sharp focus as the internationalisation of campuses increased significantly during this time, and EAP classrooms expanded in numbers as well as changing in their student body.

The strong teleological sense of mission that critical EAP possessed was thus intensified with Edge (2006) and others asking ‘what is to be done?’ in response to events like these. For some EAP advocates, the answer was to take an overtly party political stance that saw them oppose particular administrations. Edge (2004) critiqued the Bush, Blair and Howard governments’ war on terror, while Benesch’s answer was to actively seek to counter US military recruitment on her campus in New York State (see below). Thus, the twin influences of neo-liberal globalisation and the neo-conservative foreign policy of the Bush presidency further helped to build a coherent critical identity and give advocates of CEAP a clear sense of mission.
The crisis of first wave CEAP: the need for a critique of the critical?

By 2009, Benesch and other advocates of CEAP had established a clear counter narrative to the accommodationist status quo. This was an alternative politics of EAP based on a critique of liberal capitalism that sought to advance goals of social justice and emancipation. Though the end of the Bush presidency had seemed to take some of the urgency out of CEAP’s message, globalisation as negative force remained as the core raison d’être for CEAP (Benesch, 2009). However, this clash of ideological positions between the so-called accommodationist mainstream and CEAP was very much a ‘top down’ dialectic as critical theorists, pedagogues and advocates of CEAP developed intellectual weapons to challenge the status quo. Despite the emancipatory goals of both critical pedagogy and critical EAP, the voices of those in the classroom and their local contexts seemed to take second place.

According to postmodern critics of critical pedagogy, this top down dialectic is an inevitable result of the fact that both liberal capitalism and critical pedagogy’s counterpoint are grand modernist narratives that set out a particular vision for how the world is or indeed should be. Foucault termed these narratives ‘regimes of truth’, ideological positions that assert certain beliefs and behaviours as true and correct, and others as untrue and incorrect (Foucault, 1986). Regimes of truth, which include academic disciplines and social practices, are reproduced and reinforced each time power is exercised through them. Foucault’s position is that power is not fixed and is always in a state of flux. This fundamental instability as to what is oppressive and what is not means that no ideological position or regime of truth should be considered ‘inherently liberating or oppressive’ (Sawicki, 1988, p. 166). Foucault warns that every regime of truth is ‘dangerous’ (Foucault, 1983, pp. 231–232) and should be questioned. Thus, if critical pedagogy is simply another regime of truth, it cannot be considered as either inherently empowering or liberating, and thus neither should its direct ideological descendant CEAP.

Indeed, according to Gore (1993), critical pedagogy should be considered as an example of a regime of truth with its own beliefs and practices, its own progressive meta-narrative of what the world should look like. Indeed, Usher and Edwards note that critical pedagogy has the ‘teleological certainty’ (1994, p. 218) of any modernist project. This is also true of CEAP with its mission to bring about ‘reforms’ in ‘academic institutions…the workplace and community’ (Benesch, 2001, p. xviii), and its belief that globalisation and capitalism are largely oppressive forces that it should challenge (Benesch, 2009 and Chun, 2009). Consequently, from a Foucauldian position, critical pedagogy and CEAP are as ‘dangerous’ (Foucault, 1983, pp. 231–232) as any other modernist regimes of truth.

However, both critical pedagogy and CEAP have largely ignored Foucault’s warning, and seem reluctant to consider the danger of oppression inherent in any regime of truth. Thus, it could be argued that CEAP is at risk of not being alive to the possibility that it could be a source of repression that imposes its own beliefs and practices on students. Benesch (2001) and Pennycook (1999) do acknowledge the need for CEAP to be critical and reflective of its own practice. Benesch raises this issue in her 2001 monograph when she states that CEAP should problematise its own practice, also urging (however briefly) reflection on the part of critical practitioners (Benesch, 2001, pp. 63–64). Yet, the call for self-criticality is never developed by Benesch or any later authors into a coherent and well-argued critique of the CEAP position. As Gore argued in relation to wider critical pedagogy, calls for reflection are never followed by actual ‘self-examination’ (1993, p. 104).

Of course, CEAP claims that its goals are emancipatory but the practitioner is faced with a dilemma: what happens if those in the classroom do not share CEAP’s goals? As
Freedman argues (2007, p. 445) ‘what gives critical educators the right [to teach a regime of truth that] could be foreign not only to the students [but also to their] community at large? The problem perhaps is particularly acute when CEAP begins to engage with ‘live’ policies, politicians and institutions. For example, Benesch (1996) describes how in 1994 she encouraged her students to take a critical stance towards the policy by New York State gubernatorial candidate George Pataki to cut public spending on education. Students were encouraged to write letters to the candidate expressing their concern and opposition to his policies. In addition, some students took part in marches and demonstrations opposing future governor Pataki’s position (Benesch, 1996). Benesch, however, does not suggest where contradictory positions and dissenting voices would fit within the regime of truth exercised in the classroom. It is not clear how students who may have come to the classroom in favour of Pataki’s lower public spending and lower taxation platform would be able to find their autonomous voice. There appear to be no opportunities created to write to or demonstrate against Pataki’s opponent, incumbent Governor Mario Cuomo.

Similarly, in the latter part of the Iraq War, Benesch (2010) used her classes to enable students to resist the efforts of US military recruiters operating on her institution’s campus. Though her 2010 contribution to an edited volume described her objective as ‘responding’ (Benesch, 2010, p. 109) to military recruitment, an earlier version of her work perhaps more accurately described her goal as one of ‘countering’ recruitment activities (Benesch, 2009, p. 85). Once again, there is little apparent space for any contradictory positions. Benesch does show an awareness of the risk of imposing an ideological agenda: she states that in the course of teaching her class, she moved from a position of opposing the presence of recruiters on campus to enabling students to formulate their own responses (Benesch, 2010, p. 114). However, in her account of her teaching, no space seems to be given to positions that support military recruitment on campus (Benesch, 2010).

For example there is no evidence of a discussion of the argument that the US military has for several decades offered an important route of socio-economic advancement for immigrants and that many have welcomed this route (O’Sullivan, 2009, pp. 7–11). These two examples of classroom practice highlight the fact that without a sufficient element of self-awareness and self-critique, there is a real risk that the student’s own position is marginalised.

The very real dilemmas of implementing critical pedagogy in the classroom were highlighted by Ellsworth in her 1989 paper, ‘Why Doesn’t This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy’. Ellsworth reflected upon her attempts to implement a critical approach during a series of classes exploring racism at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Among Ellsworth’s criticisms were that she felt there was an attempt to lead students towards a predestined goal, regardless of the varied views and positions the students brought to class with them. She argued that critical pedagogy seemed to want to ignore or marginalise ‘contradictory subject positions’ (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 315). Ellsworth’s paper provoked considerable hostility from many critical educators (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 218), yet Freire’s work highlighted a potential problem with the CEAP agenda. Freire argued that critical pedagogy should respond to students, who held too strongly to ‘contradictory subject positions’, and were therefore too resistant to the critical stance by excluding such students from the classroom (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 94). While Benesch does not go so far as to contemplate the exclusion of students who disagree with the critical agenda, she does argue that ultimately the emancipatory goals of CEAP take precedence over ‘the opposition of a few students’ who should not be allowed to ‘dominate the discourse’ (Benesch, 2001, p. 85). Therefore, the implementation of a
CEAP curriculum includes a set of clear, political goals, and shows the dominance of an overall meta-narrative of how the world should be. This poses challenges for the practitioner who wishes to develop both a critical and inclusive classroom.

**Critical EAP, a second wave: language and EAP as local practices?**

In this final section, I suggest that there is the potential to develop a second wave critical approach that can move beyond top down narratives and can re-centre the politics of EAP on to students’ own local contexts. Thus, the EAP practitioner would have the space to question and challenge what they do, while not losing sight of their students’ beliefs and values.

During the 1990s, and the first decade of the twenty-first century, the political ‘high ground’ of CEAP was dominated by grand narratives of resistance, liberation and social justice. Perhaps inevitably, as EAP developed a coherent political consciousness, and Pennycook and Benesch challenged the accommodationist status quo, these big questions took centre stage. However, there were already attempts to more closely link critical approaches to the classroom and move CEAP beyond a clash of ideologies. Canagarajah (1999), though very much a ‘political’ EAP thinker also concerned with questioning the status quo, focussed on how local-level resistance to domination takes place when students take ownership of English and use it for their own purposes. In effect, he sought to localise the critical approach and make CEAP less about the universal and more about the particular.

Another attempt to negotiate this tension between the universal and the local, i.e. a ‘top down’ regime of truth versus the ‘bottom up’ voices of students, came from Grande’s (2004) research into critical pedagogy and Native American communities. In *Red Pedagogy*, Grande explored the initial responses from Native American educators and leaders to critical pedagogy as yet another ‘white man’s ideology’ that consisted of universal top down claims that left little space for their own beliefs and practices. However, as an author sympathetic to the goals of critical education, Grande’s approach was certainly not to discard the progressive aims of critical pedagogy. Instead, the starting point for the development of a new ‘red pedagogy’ were the beliefs and practices of Native American communities, not the universal Freirian narrative. For Grande, a truly emancipatory pedagogy was rooted in local practice working from the bottom up to seek common ground with the critical approach. Grande’s pedagogy would create space for the history and experiences of students, asking how students respond to the material and specifically how Native American traditions and ideas would relate to the issues raised in the material.

Benesch’s reformulation of the traditional needs analysis to a ‘critical needs analysis’ or ‘rights analysis’ (1996) did, of course, promise an opportunity to address local needs. A rights analysis, while still focussed on emancipatory goals, began with the students and what they should expect to get from their programme. As with Canagarajah (1999), the focus was on enabling students to take ownership of their language and their academic programme. Through her collaborative work with the psychology faculty, the critical approach embedded in a rights analysis also foreshadowed Grande’s work as it sought to negotiate a critical path between the universal goals of a regime of truth, a psychology syllabus and the students own ‘local’ position. However, while the theoretical aspects of CEAP has been developed substantially, more research needs to be done to develop methodologies or frameworks that EAP practitioners can readily pick up, and implement such needs/rights analysis in order to enable the practitioner to navigate the space between the universal and the local, between the teacher’s ‘hegemony’ and students own needs and thoughts, and avoid the potential pitfalls of first wave CEAP.
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Despite moves to step beyond a clash of ideologies and begin with local contexts, first wave CEAP was dominated by the grand narratives of resistance and emancipation after 2001. It could be argued that the wider political debates created by the rise of globalisation and the Bush Presidency’s neo-conservative foreign policy diverted CEAP away from its initial interest in EAP as a local practice and taking the students’ own position and voice as its starting point. Thus, while Chun (2009) and Grey (2009) in the Journal of EAP special issue attempted to apply CEAP in new contexts, the traditional grand narratives of CEAP retained their pre-eminence. Despite this, Pennycook’s 2010 monograph Language as Local Practice provided the intellectual resources to decisively shift how we engage with language, language teaching and, by extension, EAP.

Pennycook breaks with traditional understanding of the development of English as a global language, arguing that the English language is best understood as a social phenomenon that happens at multiple sites across the globe (2010). A local practice of English thus develops at each of these sites linking with and influencing the global. Thus, for Pennycook, attempts to understand language, language teaching and the practice of EAP need to focus on local contexts rather than universal narratives. Similarly, Crystal (1998) and Phillipson (1992) saw the global phenomenon of English as best understood as a centrifugal force that, for good or ill, influenced societies across the globe from its heartlands in the UK and North America. Seen through Pennycook’s re-framing of world English(es), this is exactly what Canagarajah (1999), Grande (2004) and Benesch (1996), through her rights analysis, had previously attempted to do. In Benesch’s rights analysis, reflective and critical EAP practitioners already have a means to move forward. Indeed, Helmer (2013), with her rediscovery of rights analysis, attempts to do exactly this.

Therefore, a ‘second wave’ Critical EAP should aim to re-centre itself on EAP as a local practice as it is enacted at differing institutions across the globe. This is not to suggest that questions of social justice and students’ rights in the academy are less important, but that the starting point needs to be an engagement with the local positions of students rather than a universal critical narrative that risks imposing its own regime of truth upon the EAP classroom. As Grande (2004) suggests, it is through starting with local positions and negotiating any common ground between the critical and the local that a genuinely progressive agenda can be developed. Thus, a second wave EAP potentially offers the reflective EAP practitioner a way forward that avoids the marginalisation of his/her students’ position(s), but is politically aware and seeks to question, challenge and even resist established narratives.

Conclusion: implications for the EAP practitioner

The core contribution of critical EAP has been to move beyond the political naivety of the accommodationist position and develop a space to reflect on the politics of the EAP profession. However, despite the emancipatory goals of first wave CEAP, its position as yet another top down ‘regime of truth’ without sufficient self-critique meant it was also a potentially oppressive approach that marginalised students and their particular cultural contexts. The only option first wave CEAP offers the EAP practitioner faced with the question of whether he or she should reject the accommodationist position is to embark on its own grand narrative of liberation. The politically reflective EAP professional may seek to avoid the critical approach taken by Benesch and Freire by deliberately teaching both sides of the argument. However, it is perhaps questionable as to how many real world issues come down to such binary divisions. The hypothetical EAP practitioner would though, as Benesch
argued (1993, p. 714), still have to make choices over which positions to teach, while also wondering whether they are sufficiently qualified to provide formal input with regard to complex social, political and economic issues. ELT teachers, of course, engage with such issues on a regular basis; they are the core material of many fluency tasks. However, in EAP, content is more than just a vehicle for language; it actually matters and content related to the student’s future course of study needs to be delivered carefully.

Ultimately, however, there is a more intractable problem that is highlighted by Freedman (2007): if the teacher provides top-down input, their voice will always have a unique position in the classroom. Freedman argues that it is difficult for the classroom to be a democratic environment where all voices are equal. He draws on the critical theory of Habermas to argue that the classroom may never achieve ‘ideal speech conditions’ because the voice of the teacher will always have a special kind of authority (Freedman, 2007, p. 450). Therefore, in both theory and practice, the EAP practitioner is caught between rival discourses. He/she can either willfully ignore the political nature of his/her profession or embark on a ‘first wave’ critical approach that risks being as top down and hegemonic as the accommodationist position it challenges. In both scenarios, his/her voice as a teacher, his/her students’ voices, and the local context in which he/she and her students teach and learn are at risk of being marginalised. By contrast, second wave CEAP is an attempt to bring introduce the political in the EAP classroom from the bottom up.

Further reading

Benesch (2001); Pennycook (1999, 2010)

Related chapters

3 Academic literacies
4 English as the academic lingua franca
7 EAP in multilingual English-dominant contexts

Notes

1 Entrepreneurs feature very strongly in ELT publications.
2 Pennycook’s attempt to widen the neutrality debate also addressed arguments that suggest the English language is a neutral commodity to be purchased freely by individuals and nations (1997, p. 258). Instead, he argues that it also reveals the marketisation and neo-liberalisation of higher education, which is most definitely not a neutral activity (Pennycook, 1997, pp. 258–259).

References

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