Educational perspectives on ELT

Society and the individual; traditional, progressive and transformative

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Introduction

‘Educational perspectives on ELT’ means understanding ELT in light of larger movements within the domain of education that have influenced our field, movements which provide overarching educational aims for any particular perspective on formal instruction. In this chapter, I relate aims to curriculum concepts and philosophies of education associated with three major perspectives: first, ‘traditional’ forms of education and second, progressive education, with transformative perspectives presented as an optimistic third view more visible recently in ELT. The understanding of ELT in terms of its educational aims is important, as ELT is often thought of only in an instrumental way. An educational understanding relates, at an individual level, to what teachers themselves are aiming at, in terms of their personal values as articulated in their philosophies of teaching (though, clearly, educational perspectives are also of interest at broader levels, i.e. institutional/governmental, and also philosophical). Teachers who see ELT as a form of education would naturally want to determine what their educational values are and would therefore wish to be aware of trends or patterns in this area. In explaining this, I have drawn on a simple three-part category system that we inherit from specialists in the philosophy of education – they refer to these categories as ‘philosophies of schooling’. On the face of it, such a simple system seems likely to oversimplify – surely an area as broad as this cannot be neatly fitted into just three boxes. Some simplification for purposes of initial exposition is defensible and necessary, though I note that this particular systematisation of educational ideas has its own history and reflects its own cultural and historical biases, having emerged in the US in the mid-twentieth century.

The concept of a philosophy of schooling is one alternative at hand when we are seeking general historically located understandings of ELT. The most common alternative account seeks an initial understanding of ELT by way of stereotypical classroom practices identified by analysts of ELT ‘methods’ (see Hall, this volume, ch. 15 for related discussion). There is some overlap in these two expository strategies. However, in this chapter, I present trends and positions in ELT through engaging with the general question of ‘what is the overall educational aim for an individual student

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or for society or, more generally, of teaching English?' There can be more than one answer – and clearly, ELT teachers need to know these possibilities. A teacher’s skill in the application of classroom practices and activities will not be sufficient for professional practice if s/he is unable to see to what basic end the learning and teaching is supposed to be put or might ideally be directed. A sense of purpose or meaning that a teacher can extract from his or her practice is highly valuable for personal growth and to enable one to bear up when things do not go as one would wish. Without a vision of the overall goals of one’s work, meaning may be absent, and thus the daily grind becomes just that – a chore or drudgery. Language teachers need to locate themselves in regard to broad educational aims; they need to think about how such aims are to be achieved through curricular choices and classroom practices (and in, or against, institutional and cultural contexts). They need to decide whether such aims are or are not consistent with their own philosophy of language teaching and how to position themselves accordingly. Some ELT professionals arrive as teachers via a pathway that does not include a first degree in education, maybe primarily through the disciplinary medium of applied linguistics or by way of unsupervised apprenticeships in the private language school sector; thus, some of us may not have been oriented explicitly to the values dimension of our work. Similarly, some entrants to the field may identify only with a narrow conception of the role of language teacher, not fully appreciating its societal obligations, ethical constraints and values dimensions. Some may initially pick up only on the thinnest thread of this, which in the proprietary language school, for example, may be mainly related to the exchange of services for a fee. Nevertheless, ELT does play a major role in many societies and has philosophical and values dimensions which deserve to be engaged with as an ELT practitioner develops. In general, this perspective is engaged with too rarely, as indicated by the existence of overview texts in our field whose titles include the phrase ‘language education’ yet make no connection to educational systems or philosophies (e.g. McDonough, 2002; Nicholas and Starks, 2014).

Modern times and the emergence of mass education

The term ‘traditional’ can be useful when applied to the domain of education. It is at the same time a problematic catch-all term. I distinguish two senses of it here. First, there is ‘traditional’ in the sense of what educational institutions, curricula and teaching practices were in place before modern times. This will be close to meanings associated with the term ‘indigenous’. And second, within modern times there is a sense of ‘traditional’ that is close to ‘mainstream’, ‘dominant’ and ‘long-standing’. I will take up the second here and return to the first towards the end of the chapter.

The present period is often referred to as modern times, or ‘modernity’ (e.g. by Hall et al., 1996) – the period of time characterised both by the rise of the modern nation-state, notably in Western Europe (since the Treaty of Westphalia, 1648, which was instrumental in establishing concepts of the sovereign state), but also with characteristic linguistic, societal and person-related features. In developing one’s values in language teaching, it is important to recognise that the nation-state developed hand in hand with the establishment of national languages. In this period and from this viewpoint, national languages are thought of as homogenous and important for communication and mutual comprehensibility among citizens of the state. Society is seen in terms of the nation-state, and the language is tied to, or circumscribed by, fixed borders; the people within a particular society are considered to be (or pressed to be) the same, culturally and linguistically. The nation-state also grew up along with mass education. Before there was mass education, most people simply did not have any education, although the elite had tutoring or went to a handful of special institutions often attached to other non-educational institutions,
most obviously churches and temples. Mass education came along with the industrial revolution, as is indicated still by many older, factory-like school buildings. It is obvious that they were and are intended to deliver services to large groups of similar pupils, turning out a quality product – or at least a homogenous product – and one that fits the needs of the state and the taxpayers, the entities that foot the bill. Modernity also favoured science over religion and appeared in the West first, thus benefiting Western cultures over others.

**Modern times: modern education as ‘essentialist’**

The nation-state of modern times is initially a European phenomenon. The advancement of Europe (and in due course, the USA) over other areas was attributed, at the time, to these countries’ superior economic base in science and industry. This became a reason for providing a technical education for ordinary people. Educational reformers in favour of a national education system (as opposed to private schools) believed it would socialise citizens appropriately in accord with dominant political and moral values (Mitch, 1992; Crookes, 2009: 51). In the US, this was so that democracy would flourish (since democracy needs an educated electorate to function). But also in the US, it was so that the social classes would mix in a ‘common school’, and by the late nineteenth century, under pressure of immigration, it was so that the newcomers would be Americanised, becoming homogenous users of one language, graduating from one education system.

In the account so far in this section, I have not introduced ELT. But its forerunners were there, in a couple of guises. In the British colonies, specifically India, the initial administrators valued indigenous languages and cultures. What became established policy, however, was the promotion of English language and culture and, in support, English language teaching. This was articulated initially by Mill (1817) and more bluntly by Macaulay (1835, paragraph 34), who stated that the aim was to reproduce Indians as Englishmen: “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.”

Meanwhile, in the US, English instruction for immigrants was on the rise (though provision of education in immigrant first languages declined). Compulsory education laws, with English instruction specified, became common at state level. The 1906 Naturalization Act required US immigrants to show a command of English to become citizens. Elementary and high schools made no special provision for English instruction for immigrants, but night schools had specialised classes (Ross, 1937).

In ELT, the Prussian method that became known as grammar-translation (Fick, 1800) manifested itself as highly routinised techniques, ways into the second language via its grammatical structures and a process of translation of isolated sentences. A “high priority [was] attached to meticulous standards of accuracy which, as well as having an intrinsic moral value, was a prerequisite for passing the increasing number of formal written examinations that grew up during the century” (Howatt, 1984: 132; see also Hall, this volume, ch. 15). For language teachers, this is the method most commonly thought of as ‘traditional’, and this is indeed how language teaching historian Kelly refers to it (1969: 53), while pointing out (following Rouse and Appleton, 1925) that it is “not older than the nineteenth century”. Though beginning outside state schools (and driven by utilitarian needs), materials and curriculum for learning English (mostly as a foreign language) in state high schools in developed countries such as Germany, France and Japan during much of the twentieth century came to reflect this as the dominant perspective.
The aims of this kind of education and the conceptions of the individual and of society implied by it are summarised in the philosophy of education literature under the technical term ‘essentialist’, coined by US (Russian-expatriate) academic Demiashkevich (1935: 5–6). It conceived of

the demands of social heritage, . . . standards of the good life that are cherished by the group (tribe, caste, religious organization, or nation) . . . [and] the standards of competence set by the occupational group (trade, vocation, profession). . . . [It expected] systematic . . . sequential curricula . . . [and] attention to fundamentals, such as the permanent moral values of humanity and the information, skills, aptitudes, and attitudes without which – in the judgment of educational authorities – neither the individual . . . nor the group can achieve the good life.

Key aspects were that curriculum should be determined by the needs of the “nation” and target “occupational group[s] . . . [or] profession[s]” (ibid.). An instrumental view of education is thus in place – something practical, useful and material is to be done with the education obtained; most likely, for the skill of ELT, it is to be used in the discharge of employment-related matters. More broadly, the essentialist aim of education is to prepare individuals to be good upstanding individuals who can fit into the existing order of society, with emphasis on character building, shared knowledge of a single culture that manifests in and unifies the nation-state and education preparing individuals for useful employment. Originating with the rise of the industrial nation-state in the West, this perspective rapidly expanded to developing countries during the twentieth century and now holds sway throughout the world.

This ‘essentialist’ perspective is still dominant today, but it has altered. The previously strong statist perspective – emphasising a unitary nation-state for which education makes citizens – has diminished in force and visibility. This change is signalled by the term ‘neo-liberal’, describing aspects of capitalist economies and countries in which the private limited-stock company is the dominant form of economic organisation, as opposed to publicly-owned or cooperatively-owned enterprises (see also Pennycook, and Menard-Warwick et al., this volume). This means that business corporations see their interests as less identified with the nation-state as before. The free movement of capital and labour across national boundaries is to the advantage of businesses, which themselves may be domiciled for tax purposes outside of their major market countries; consequently, the target of educational systems is now the creation of individuals who are flexible, mobile, not rooted in specific areas, not attached to an ancestral language and not identified with one set of job-related skills but willing to learn or relearn new ones, including, most especially, English as the international lingua franca (see Seargeant, this volume).

It is this perspective on the individual and learner which begins to be manifest in curricular statements and through the universal ELT coursebook (Chun, 2013; Gray, 2013). Despite many efforts at reform, it is still easy to find forms of English teaching which emphasise knowledge rather than use, teacher-fronted classrooms, memorisation, drill and practice and heavy use of standardised testing. In many cases, the English language is taught only for its use in sorting mechanisms, not actually as a means of communication. Where communication is used as the justification for teaching English, the language is advanced as the international language of business, or just as the main instrumentally dominant language, so considerations of efficiency and practicality are behind the aims of this so-called traditional form of language education.

This essentialist and instrumental line of thinking and practice, in modern times, has had one major counter-trend, to which I turn next.
Progressive education

At the same time as the central nation-states in Europe were beginning to industrialise, a counter-movement, opposed to rules, regimentation, rigid social structures and materialism, was beginning. The Romantic Movement of the late 1700s did support the idea of a nation (and was implicated in the initial modern version of France, and in the forces that eventually brought Germany into existence), but it also contained within it ideas of individual freedom and something of an opposition to rationality; certainly there was an emphasis on nature, natural growth and spirit. The visibility of these ideas in the realm of educational theory and then practice is attributed to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He opposed dominant ideas about child-rearing and education – the idea that children were inherently bad, and that (according to Martin Luther, Calvin, Wesley and others in this tradition) it was essential to break the will of the child before education or even proper child-rearing could proceed. Thus when a teacher such as Pestalozzi (1801) took up Rousseau’s ideas, put them into practice and reported results, he was able to describe a loving and supportive educational environment, much to the surprise of many conventional thinkers but to the delight of intellectuals and Romantics throughout Europe.

By the late nineteenth century in the English-speaking world, this tradition had become associated with the term ‘progressive’ and began to appear in private and public and mass and elite forms of education. The individual, more likely to be seen as a child than an adult in this tradition, is viewed as inherently good and capable of natural growth through experience. Other key themes in early progressive education were that it was child- or student-centred; activity and experience (rather than lecture and drill) formed the mainstay of the curriculum; a holistic perspective on individual development was called for; freedom or student choice rather than constraint and control was important; and education had the purpose of societal improvement, to foster democracy and equality. Not all of these matters would have been manifested in all progressive schools, and they would have been understood through nineteenth and early twentieth century eyes rather differently than how we might understand them today, in the multicultural, globalised twenty-first century; however, the themes are there, and we can also trace their continuation and modification, as an educational perspective, to the present day and through to some aspects of language education as well.

These ideas were taken on, and up, by many throughout Europe and elsewhere (the work of Tagore in India, Tolstoy in Russia, Tao in China, and the UK, for example, Skidelsky, 1969), though in a minority of schools. They were most successful in the US. John Dewey took over the already-progressive Parker School (Parker, 1891 [1937]), closely attached to his position as a professor of the University of Chicago, as an experimental school, while surveying and reporting on the alternative, progressive school scene as it was in the US (Dewey and Dewey, 1915). This led, through the work of the progressive education movement, to this perspective being instantiated substantially, for a while, in US state education. What this looked like in practice was a broadly democratic, project-oriented and yet practical curriculum, as reported in such works as Were we guinea pigs? (Ohio State University, University High School, 1938).

In that work, for example, the students of the high school attached to Ohio State University report the various curriculum projects they planned, initiated and carried out themselves, discuss how they researched and organised the physical aspects of their school and reflect on their overall ability to carry off complex organisational tasks and even fund-raise and arrange a field trip. The progressives’ view of society was one in which local democracy, in the form of town meetings, was the target, and their view of the individual was a person prepared to take an active civic role. While educating for the ‘growth’ (Dewey’s watchword) of the self-realised individual through a democratic curriculum and participatory classroom practices, students would be well-prepared to take on their civic duties (not merely economic roles) when they graduated from school.
However, beginning before World War II and intensifying afterwards, critics of progressivism (such as Bagley, 1934) worked to extinguish the more democratic elements of this educational perspective. Progressivism had always had two currents, an instrumental, scientistic one with a strong belief in the possibilities offered by science and a more social and political one. With the second current in retreat, the first altered into the life adjustment curriculum of the US high school in the immediate postwar period (Hartman, 2008). “Proponents of life adjustment education supported curriculum flexibility; student guidance; and attention to previously neglected areas of social living such as hygiene, family living, drivers’ education, and social relations with peers. Emphasis was upon increasing the holding power of American high schools by presenting students with a more meaningful and relevant curriculum” (Fallace, 2011: 575). It was more likely to prepare the student to be a good worker and consumer than a good citizen and was driven by the first flush of the scientific, instrumentally oriented needs-assessment procedures (Tyler, 1949) that were to play a major role in language teaching developments to come. Certainly the individual and society were seen as having identifiable and real needs that should be addressed by education, and these were not merely the needs of business or industry, nor solely those of Deweyan civic duty.

**Progressivism in ELT**

Meanwhile, a self-aware ELT profession was developing, and progressive educational perspectives had an influence on it, if initially diluted and indirect. The major historian of ELT, Howatt (1984: 220–221, 275), explains that in the UK, this was partly a response to immigration. A materials and curriculum ELT project of the mid-1960s is identified by Howatt as a major turning point in the development of ELT approaches and the moment when progressive ideas become visible in ELT. Howatt initially describes this project in terms of a melding of the pre-existing “EFL tradition of the linguistically organized syllabus” with the recently developed UK “primary school tradition of activity methods”. What the UK primary school ‘tradition’ looked like was certainly of international and especially US interest. Learning through doing and using, group and pair work, classrooms organised in terms of study centres, much use of teacher-produced materials, field trips, a relaxed approach to discipline and a generally student- or child-centred perspective characterised the best schools in this tradition.

In this period, the US Ford Foundation funded the Anglo-American Primary Education Project. It sent US teachers on study tours of UK schools and published descriptions of the British primary practices (e.g. Featherstone, 1971; see also Rogers, 1970) for the US audience, which were at the time signalled by the term ‘informal education’ (crystallised in the Plowden Report: Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967; Galton, 1987). These were seen as maintaining the progressive methods that had been pushed aside in the US during the same post-war period (e.g. Armytage, 1967), and it was from them that progressive practices entered ELT. A progressive orientation was also to be found in another early 1970s UK language teaching project that Howatt focuses on (Concept 7–9, 1972; authors, Wight, Norris and Worsley). Early UK ESL pushed back against a negative view of minority languages by focusing on practising in the academic high school classroom the specific kinds of language needed by immigrant L2 learners. Using the L2 to learn it (especially through group work and information-gap activities) has been a feature of communicative approaches ever since, but in Howatt’s historical account, it is associated with language teachers who are acting on behalf of a minority group against mistaken mainstream conceptions of them which were not grounded in a real understanding of minority language use.

Thus, almost all aspects of what in ELT came to be called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) can be found in the progressive tradition, and the primary means of this transmission seems
to have been the maintenance of an activity-based, student-centred approach with strong roots in the pre-existing progressive perspective. In addition to activities as an area in which progressive education and ELT in its communicative conception came together, let me also point out the role of the teacher as a facilitator and the conception of the learner as one who explores through activities and active engagement with the subject matter, making mistakes and learning from them.

The aims of both progressive education as conceived in primary ELT and the emergent CLT of the 1970s and beyond, then, in simple terms, are focused on individual growth, reflecting individual (not state) needs and fostering the development of personal autonomy, with the communication that is to be achieved conceptualised in terms of functional communication about matters of personal concern and importance. The one ‘progressive’ aim that seems to have been lost along the way to CLT is the importance of preparing for citizenship. Progressive educational aims certainly included fostering and supporting democracy, which is not evident in CLT.

The 1970s saw the rapid international growth of a self-aware ELT profession and an associated academic discipline (applied linguistics). Progressive elements were to be found in some of the alternative ‘humanistic’ methods that flourished briefly in late twentieth century ELT (see, for example, Galyean, 1977, discussed in Crookes, 2009; also Hall, this volume, ch. 15) and more persistently in the efforts to promote learner autonomy in ELT (e.g. Benson and Voller, 1997; also Benson, this volume). Language schools that were entirely separate from the state sector and organised primarily for adults found themselves free to try out new ideas but were usually driven by profit considerations. Post-colonial English teaching in schools and universities maintained dominant or traditional perspectives, teaching structural and instrumentally driven English with the award of credentials as their main aim. On the other hand, the flows of migrants into the core English-speaking countries, many forced to displace from one country to another through wars of liberation or decolonisation, resulted in a growth within ELT of forms of adult ESL that had the potential to take the aims of progressive education on yet further. This perspective is summed up here under the heading of transformative education.

**Transformative education**

As the name suggests, transformative education is an educational perspective, a philosophy of schooling, in which the aim of education is to transform society (in a positive way, in directions signalled typically by a term such as ‘social justice’). Historically, there are two (Western) versions of the story of transformative education. One is that in Europe, just as modern times were beginning and right from the beginnings of the Romantic movement around the 1790s, a radical version of progressive education had also come into existence (in, for example, the writings and actions of individuals such as William Godwin, Thomas Paine, and Mary Wollstonecraft [Simon, 1972]). Among its inheritors were anarchist educators like Ferrer who, in the 1910s, produced the Modern School, a small international network of schools that preserved radical political traditions (such as an activist role for the citizen, direct democracy and distrust of or opposition to the state) along with high levels of student autonomy in small private educational institutions that lasted until the 1950s. The other story, beginning a little later and independent of the first one, was that a more explicitly socialist wing of the US Progressive Movement developed, exemplified by Counts (1932) and Rugg (1931). This encouraged US and other progressive teachers to teach and to act politically inside and outside of school with the intention of radically reforming society – particularly during the Great Depression, when many felt that capitalism was truly destroying economies, that radical alternatives were needed and that teachers and education had a role to play in this transformation. Counts’ development of the progressive tradition is called ‘social reconstructionist’.
US opponents of the very idea of social justice and of the position that education should further it resisted these initiatives. The Progressive Movement was a much bigger target than its socialist left wing, the social reconstructionists, but both were attacked. The Cold War enabled opponents to label them ‘unpatriotic’, and most of the state manifestations of progressive and radical traditions in education in the US were, for a time, erased. Meanwhile, an avowedly socialist government took office in the UK immediately at the end of World War II (Lawton, 1977). I have already mentioned the somewhat atheoretical version of the progressive tradition which coalesced in the UK in the 1960s under the heading of ‘informal education’. This eventually regrouped in the US as the ‘open classroom’ movement of the early 1970s (Cuban, 2004). These developments encompassed the increasingly radical and diverse currents in education, reflecting the social changes of the time. Adult education became a visible site for the manifestation of a transformative educational perspective. Recently exiled Brazilian literacy educator Paulo Freire spent time at Harvard University and had strong effects on second language and other adult educators through his best-seller, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970). Along with the massive, wrenching changes in society and the political upheavals around the Vietnam War and other wars of popular liberation, the anti-colonial struggle, movements for women and gay liberation and Black Power, transformative ways of doing school and L2 learning and teaching were sought out enthusiastically by many young people (students as well as teachers, not to mention radical academics).

The assumptions this educational perspective makes about learning, the learner, the teacher, materials and curriculum, and the wider socio-political context overlap and draw from the progressives but are more challenging. The conception of society is that it is a site of conflict. A critique of society is implied, and this suggests that a teacher implementing it views society as being seriously in need of improvement. The social goal of this kind of education is to improve society, but going beyond merely more and better democracy, a fairly radical transformation is called for. Materials and curriculum are not only to be activity-based, but the curriculum (or syllabus) is to be negotiated with learners and must reflect their needs as articulated by them in a process of dialogue with the teacher (this puts the student in an activist role and makes the classroom itself democratic). The teacher is not merely a facilitator but also someone willing to challenge students (without imposing on them) through articulating her or his perspective on materials, content and theories of language and society. The view of the individual learner is not merely as one active individual among others but as a person with class, race and gender whose identity both affects learning and also is changed in the process of learning (particularly of a second language). For ELT, these aims manifested, a few years after Freire’s work became widely-published in English, in discussions such as Moriarty and Wallerstein (1979) and subsequently in published materials such as Auerbach and Wallerstein (1987). What these published materials aim to do is enable adult immigrant ESL learners to raise in the classroom practical issues they face in daily life, and, using the classroom, fellow students and the teacher as resources, investigate the problem and the language needed to address it. Auerbach and Wallerstein’s work, for example, includes units on ‘the job search’ (where the job search is not necessarily successful), ‘talking with the boss’ (not always understood), ‘the deportation scare’ and ‘stress’ (the result of overwork in garment-making), to mention just a few. I mention the most obviously challenging topics, but this should not suggest that only problems are focused on. However, the point is that problems are posed, and it is for the students collectively to consider how, using the L2, they will deal with them, bringing up their own topics as needed and negotiating the syllabus accordingly. (It is not the teacher’s job, nor the role of the textbook materials, to solve the problems.) These materials and this philosophy of schooling do not indoctrinate the learner, nor even tell him/her what to do. But it hopes that by facilitating the ability to critically understand society and use language to improve the learner’s own situation, this will carry forward to the learners themselves being able to use language to improve society. Much more
recently, individual ELT specialists have explored the use of these ideas and associated classroom practices in a range of EFL countries and provided teacher-research reports of their efforts (some summarised in Crookes, 2011).

**Back to the future? ‘Traditional’ education and ELT in the twenty-first century**

As mentioned earlier, there is more than one form of ‘traditional’ education. Besides the traditions of mass education discussed earlier, there is also indigenous education. It is consistent with a transformative perspective on education that indigenous education should not be dismissed. Ideas and forces associated with the rise of the modern nation-state certainly did dismiss, indeed tried to expunge, traditional forms and indigenous values; but the transformative tradition sees that as an unethical exercise of power and identifies it as very much associated with colonialism, which it is opposed to.

As previously discussed, large-scale economic development, as well as mass education and its associated range of educational aims, came about first in the West. That makes ‘non-Western’ the other side of a relevant albeit simplistic dichotomy. So, a comprehensive discussion in this chapter should try to also engage with non-Western traditions in education. Non-Western education here includes both the traditions of very simple societies but also the traditions of non-Western civilisations. The latter were originally, in a sense, indigenous, but developed into urban and highly literate forms. Thus, they can be associated with the major non-Christian religions, philosophies, forms of science (Selin, 1992), civilisations and ways of life signalled by terms like Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu and so on (see Reagan, 1996). The individual, and the society, imagined or discussed thus far in the chapter has in fact been that of the Western, industrial, so-called developed and secular world. However, the perspectives implied by a phrase such as Buddhist civilisation should also be considered. ELT should have space for the Buddhist student, the Islamic teacher, the Confucian society and the associated philosophies of teaching and schooling, though published discussions of these interactions are rare.

Turning now to the more established understanding of ‘indigenous’ as a form of traditional education: while many indigenous cultures and peoples have indeed been exterminated by the ‘modernising’ forces of the twentieth century and continue to be under great pressure in the twenty-first century, they are themselves not static. They duck and feint and transform themselves, engaging with the modern world but endeavouring to remain true to their traditions even while those traditions may change.

There certainly are many academic treatises on indigenous education. However, the interface of indigenous education and ELT may be hard to perceive or imagine at first. That may be because where ELT has met indigenous cultures, this has usually been in the context of colonialism and Christian missionary work, and the result is usually a post-colonial education system rather than one which is still visibly indigenous. However, at the risk of oversimplifying, a few points can be made (following Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo, 2002; Jacobs, 2013).

The indigenous viewpoint is often presented as holistic. That is, the individual is located within the physical, social, familial and personal environment, and a spiritual dimension for that location is usually articulated as well (e.g. Wilson, 1999). There is no place for the individualist neoliberal worker here. And the individual’s engagement with the environment is often presented as a spiritual, certainly an ethical one, with preservation and maintenance rather than transformation, let alone exploitation, as goals and responsibilities. This is a good form of conservatism; but being inward-looking, it perhaps does not lend itself to the learning of languages from outside, (but see Hornberger, 2008). On the other hand, it is clearly not necessarily
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a monolingual perspective. Some indigenous cultures engage with others at a linguistic level; other not entirely modern nations and cultures are explicitly multilingual or expect a degree of plurilingual competence from their members (Canagarajah and Wurr, 2011); many recognise the power of English but also its dangers. Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (2002) report on the teaching of an indigenous language arts teacher in the Solomon Islands:

We call Lindsay’s teaching “counter-hegemonic” because his practices are grounded in indigenous epistemology, they model for students’ indigenous critical praxis, and they prepare students for further schooling or returning to the village. In kindergarten, where the Ministry policy allows some use of children’s first language, Lindsay alternates lessons in Kwara’ae and English (the official school medium of instruction); at higher grade levels, he uses English and SI [Solomon Islands] Pijin. In a discourse analytic study of Lindsay’s kindergarten language arts lessons . . . we found that Lindsay uses village conversational discourse patterns and pieces of caregiver-child interactional routines known to his students, during literacy tasks. His interactive lessons contrast sharply with those of typical SI rural classroom teachers’ recitation format inhabited from colonial days. Most striking is Lindsay’s use of a traditional Kwara’ae argument technique found in planning, debate, and oratory: ‘ini te’ete’e suli ru’anga (literally, “inching with the fingers along it”). The metaphor (from gardening) refers to careful, step-by-step systematic reasoning well-supported with evidence, and involves a set of clearly marked discourse routines. Kwara’ae children are familiar with those routines not only from attending village events with their parents, but also from their use to teach children linguistic, social, and intellectual skills at home. We believe that Lindsay’s use of this strategy is one factor in his students’ success in learning English.

So, this exemplifies some important aspects of how traditional, in the sense of indigenous, remains a valuable educational perspective, even influencing some local delivery of ELT, while exemplifying positive values that are generally relevant even in a globalised world.

Implications for the individual teacher

What do these various perspectives mean for the individual developing English language teacher? I think that all teachers should make an effort to identify personally important aspects of what it is they want to be doing, as teachers, in the area of individual values and beliefs (Crookes, 2003). Language teaching should be more than a paycheck. We work with other humans; our efforts can help or harm them; we also are directly engaged in the multicultural aspects of the countries we work in and, as somewhat bicultural people ourselves, we almost certainly have a desire to make the spaces within which we work maximally accommodating to those with a foot in more than one culture. So we are almost inevitably engaged with the socio-cultural and thus political aspects of our countries of residence. Language teaching is a value-laden enterprise, and we would do well to recognise this reality. It should help, conceptually, for us to notice that the language teaching practices we deliver, engage with, and have been inculcated with themselves have values or philosophies underlying them. Even classroom practices that are not language-specific have morally right and morally wrong ways of being conducted. If we do not consider the educational underpinnings of language teaching practices (and consult relevant literature, and talk with our peers and our mentors), we will find ourselves obliged to implement practices we might not fully agree with. That in itself is not as problematic as implementing practices whose intellectual or moral bases we do not understand. Conscious compromise is not as bad as sleep-walking through what should be a moral, values-based practice.
However, the responsibility cannot be exclusively placed on the individual teacher. School administrators, teacher educators, directors of studies, section heads, all should be looking to foster professional development at levels beyond those of technique – at levels of personal consciousness and growth. A tall order, it might be said, but the materials for doing so are more easily available than before. What is less available than before, as work intensification and de-professionalisation proceed apace in neoliberal environments, is the time and space to support such development. It is nevertheless the right thing to do.

Future developments and conclusion

Discussions of future developments in the field of education are very much bound up with the massive implications of recent developments in educational technology in the Internet era (see, for example, Gruba, Hinkelman and Cárdenas-Claro, this volume). I think these do not necessarily favour any particular values or philosophical position, but they do enable the participatory aspects of transformative educational perspective to be implemented more easily; clearly, language students can talk to others using the target language in other places; they can also be actively involved in the creation of their own materials and the organisation of their own courses. Internet technology does also facilitate access to non-mainstream, nondominant strains of thought (government firewalls aside). But there are other real-world developments that may be more relevant to understanding the role of educational perspectives in ELT. I am thinking of the inter-penetration of cultures within and across political borders, and the increasing non-homogeneity of institutions, from nation-state on down through school systems, to the classroom and to the village. These developments are not conducive to the statist, homogeneity-promoting position of essentialism. So under some working conditions, a language teacher who cares to, has greater ease than in previous decades in teaching with a values position opposed to essentialism. Of course, the power of English and its engagement with employment-related preparation will allow instrumentally oriented approaches in ELT to dominate. But the feasibility of alternative positions, which I personally see as the more desirable ones, is, I like to think, better as we look to the future – always provided that language teachers are willing to think, reflect and explore the alternatives that have been present almost as long as (English) language teaching has been in existence.

Discussion questions

• To what extent do you believe that it is the role of ELT professionals to engage in ‘transformative’ education?
• What are the needs of English language learners? How do different answers to this question indicate different perspectives in ELT education? Do you focus on learners’ needs, and if so, why?
• What might Buddhist or Islamic approaches to ELT look like for the individual or for society? Why might these approaches not be best described as ‘traditional’?
• Can indigenous education be transformative? If so, how? If not, why not?
• Do you have a philosophy of teaching that corresponds to any of the philosophies of schooling outlined in this chapter?

Related topics

Communicative language teaching in theory and practice; Method, methods and methodology; Politics, power relationships and ELT; Values in the ELT classroom
Further reading

Crookes, G. V. (2009) *Values, philosophies and beliefs in TESOL: Making a statement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (An extensive overview of the area briefly sketched out by this chapter.)


Pennycook, A. (2001) *Critical applied linguistics*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. (A sophisticated and reflexive overview that encompasses the entire domain considered here within a transformative understanding of applied linguistics, including ELT.)

References


Counts, G. S. (1932) *Dare the school build a new world order?* New York: John Day Co.


Ohio State University, University High School. (1938) *Were we guinea pigs?* New York: Henry Holt & Co.