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Title

Indoctrination, Empowerment or Emancipation? The Role of ELT in Global Society

Abstract

In the context of neoliberal corporate globalisation, English tends to be regarded as a commodity that can benefit individuals, corporations and national economies by increasing capacities for international communication. English Language Teaching (ELT), therefore, is often perceived as a means to a different - financially motivated – end, with the possibility of career enhancement or financial gain presented as key reasons for learning English. Business English courses are often good examples of this, with companies encouraging their employees to learn English in order to build capacity, and employees encouraged to believe that improving their English will improve their employment prospects.

However, by defining English in economic terms we are promoting an ideology that monetises learning, which in turn requires English, and English language programmes, to be broken down and itemised as marketable commodities. We are also stifling any capacities that might exist within ELT to critically explore or challenge current structures, processes and power locations within global society. Given the inequalities and injustices that these structures and processes cause, and the damaging impact of corporate-driven globalisation on the future of the planet, it seems irresponsible to omit such criticality.

In this talk, I invite participants to take a few steps back to consider the purpose of ELT and its role in the world today, with a particular focus on how our profession supports practices that inhibit the positive transformation of society - indoctrinating learners into a societal model that is both repressive and damaging. I then draw on the work of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and other critical pedagogues to explore alternatives that promote the emancipation of learners, as opposed to their indoctrination. Rather than using English to encourage compliance with existing power structures, I propose that ELT should be used to critically engage with those structures, allowing learners to identify examples of social injustice and take steps to redress imbalances. This leads to a model of ELT that is not only socially responsible but is also far more congruent with widely accepted principles of language acquisition.

Bio

Steve Brown started his English language teaching career in 1993 as a volunteer in Mongolia. He then moved to the private ELT sector and spent several years in Central/Eastern Europe and South Africa working as an

English teacher, teacher trainer and director of studies. In 2001 he returned to the UK to complete an MSc in applied linguistics at Edinburgh University. He then spent more than 15 years in the Scottish further education sector, managing and teaching on ESOL programmes. In 2018 Steve completed a Doctorate of Education from the University of Glasgow and now works as Director of Studies of the English Language Unit at the University of the West of Scotland. Steve's main research interests are in the application of the principles of critical pedagogy in English language teaching, particularly the impact of teacher education, programme design and materials development on the emancipatory potential of ELT.