

Fresh beginnings at IATEFL, Cardiff

An impassioned plea from Maureen Ellis to use language for development purposes.

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Bio

Maureen Ellis is an associate lecturer for the Open University, and also tutors on Birmingham University's Distance MA. She is currently reading for a PhD at the Institute of Education, London University, studying the professional development of Critical Global Educators. She has worked in over 40 countries as a result of her husband's career and her own freelance assignments, and now lives in Somerset.

Two days at this year's IATEFL Conference in Cardiff have left me feeling more optimistic about the ELT field than I expected. One element of this is the beginnings of an interest by members of the Global Issues SIG, to review IATEFL's stance and role towards global issues of social justice, and a desire to explore and develop the organisation's potential for good, to extend our concerns beyond publications, courses, and institutions, to our educational aims. With responsible management this embryonic interest may extend to other global issues of conflict resolution, sustainable development, and interdependence.

In our rapidly globalising world, to remain relevant yet true to our principles, we must join the search for an education for global citizenship (Oxfam 2006) not as a slogan, not as an attempt towards a political, institutional reality, but as an existential, bio-spherical interpretation of life, humanity, man, time, space, knowledge and meaning. Cosmopolitan thinkers (Heater 2002; Preece 2008) will help us find our place in the current seeming chaos, in a positive understanding of the fullest application of systems theory to our post-modern predicament (Pike and Selby 1988).

IATEFL is a key player in the world of ELT; an extended understanding of the implications for the association in issues of language beyond the promotion of English is fundamental to its determining of policy direction and strategic decision-making. I believe the conference offers us a time for review. Given our new understandings of the crucial role of language as part of the bricolage and expression of our socially constructed (Bakhtin 1981) and multiple identities, of language as performed identity (Goffman 1969) and as a locus for mediating dominant ideology, we would do well to review our own use of language, our definitions and purposes.

This 'thinkpiece' suggests a fresh look at our calling first as educators, then as teachers of language and only finally as teachers of English, or English for Specific Purposes. Such a challenging search should offer opportunity for the kind of transformative learning advocated by O'Sullivan (1999), Jackson (2008), Mezirow (2003). Significant authors within our own field offer tools in Critical Literacy (Freire's work described in Elias 1994), Critical Language Awareness (Fairclough 2001), Critical Discourse Analysis (Pennycook 2001), and for the more academic and professional, an exploration of the lessons of Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy (Kincheloe and Weil 2004; Giroux 2005; Apple *et al.* 2005; McLaren 1994).

For those already in these disciplines and pursuits, links with Development Studies (Sumner and Tribe 2008) and cross-disciplinary readings (Lund and Carr 2008) will strengthen our ability to offer our students and teachers English for Specific Purposes at an early stage, to enable them to 'read the world' and not just 'read the word', often 'our word', as we justify General English courses despite our students' and stakeholders' more specific purposes. This could reduce the inappropriate and wasteful transfer of General English instead of the Specific Purpose shipping, agriculture and tourism courses our teachers should be trained to deliver.

In seeking to bring IATEFL's aims into line with genuine 'Language for Development Purposes', we have a chance to re-examine the implications and assumptions in the words we use, so that 'language' means Habermas' communicative action in cross-cultural ethical discourse (Honneth and Joas 1991; Morrow and Torres 2002) empowered by the internet and modern technology; 'education' says not only for individual economic purposes, but for human developmental purposes; 'text' (Rubrecht 2001) includes multi-modal semiotics (Kress 2003) and 'communication' requires a sense of community (Wenger 1998).

Most of us will need to analyse the language we have come to take for granted in this mutual determination of the meanings and values that should guide our social life (Williams 1983). Others may need to ask if the structural grammar and vocabulary horizons we accept for our students are adequate to the socio-cultural complexities of life today, and search for meanings and purposes beyond our current interpretations. We may be obliged to admit that we have been less than 'critical thinkers', slow to challenge the dominance of neo-liberal meanings: where 'democracy' has been allowed to refer to an activity once every four years, where 'freedom to choose' has shamefully increased the gap between rich and poor; and where 'training' has focused on the technicist aspects of teaching.

While tracing the effects of the neo-liberal marketisation of education (Apple *et al.* 2005; Ball *et al.* 2007) and declaiming the disastrous collapse of the global economy, we might do some soul-searching of the economic within our own lives: the easy generalisations which allow us to point a finger and lay the blame at the door of the Other, whether that be the Americans, the Christians, the Muslims, the corrupt politicians of the developing world, the under-developed North of England, or the manipulative resource-rich London and South East, the younger generation, *et al.* How could we accept for so long the cheap technological toys available to us, the fine expensive carpets, the range of choice in our supermarkets, without considering the social and political deprivation and manipulation behind such production (Leonard 2007)?

It's time to acknowledge that teacher education courses, innocent of the power and significance of language policy and the pernicious effects of English as a global language (Skuttnabb-Kangas 2003), have not equipped our teachers with respect or empathy for their multi-lingual students. Language practitioners today must realise that the battles over global issues will be fought on the field of language as much as anywhere. If we are to be critical global educators, such critical thinking will have to begin with us and our use of this expertise of language on which we pride ourselves. Such an agenda will enable educators in every discipline, to examine their role in the current global crises: financial, military, economic, social or environmental. A mapping of our ELT processes and products onto the larger goals and perspective of development, will also offer new synergies and lacunae for collaborative research.

NGOs like Oxfam have been addressing such issues for many years, and have developed valuable insights and tools (2006); however, they cannot be expected to carry the educational burden alongside their own agenda of poverty reduction, a task which does not conveniently fit into the distinct disciplines some educators zealously maintain. Recently the government in Britain has joined in the enterprise, through initiatives such as the Department for International Development's 'The global dimension in the school curriculum' (DfID 2005). Educators, and consultants who wish to avoid being seen as 'con' -sultants, need urgently to share in this human endeavour.

Eight key concepts of global citizenship, social justice, conflict resolution, sustainable development, interdependence, human rights (including linguistic), diversity, and values and perceptions (read Critical Language Awareness), offer a framework which could unite the efforts of teachers of EFL, ESL, EAP, EOP, ESP, with all language teachers, while CLIL provides further energising links with other disciplines. Justifications and sources are available aplenty (Noddings 1992; the work

of Rawls and Pogge described in Enslin 2008. For those who need further convincing, simply google 'global citizenship', the 'global dimension', or 'cosmopolitanism' for the start of a rewarding journey.

A conference offers a chance to lift our sights, to refresh and recharge vision and mission, and to open doors to further professional development. The benefits of an enjoyable family reunion need balancing with the carbon footprint and 'opportunity costs', the many airmiles and the sponsorship funding, that underpin such an event, and a conviction that the socially—and morally—responsible outcomes merit the community's investment. My own presentation to a disappointingly small audience of eighteen, compensated for the small number in terms of engagement and participation, and the three apologetic technicians who struggled with my USBs—two of these because I always believe in backup plans—only proved to us present the need to stay ahead of technology!

An analysis of our conference programme, an assessment of educational outcomes, and the publishing of our evaluative criteria along with the findings, would model the sort of transparency and accountability which we currently claim is necessary in our treatment of the economic powers, as we learn the folly of raw, unregulated capitalism on the wider global stage. Bhaskar Chakravarti, the British Council's Director of ELT and exams in response to the National Audit Office said, 'We are not in a cosy, non-performing comfort zone ... We are doing pretty well already and this report endorses the balance between our public-sector heritage and our commercial activities'.

May we in ELT not be found wanting when the reckoning comes. O'Sullivan's work (cited in Gardner 2008) reminds us, we 'are material spirits, spirits of matter', with 'mysterious spirituality'; our inscapes are marked by differentiation, subjectivity, and communion. 'The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.' Let us remember our cosmopolitan identities, and the Stoic grace of 'logos', which equates speech with rational thought, to allow the wise a glimpse of the numinous or divine law in our lives (Heater 2002).

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