Appropriate methodology: context, culture and emergent practices

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Early rationale

- Conflict between two educational domains.

- Private ELT originating in Britain, Australasia and North American (BANA)
  - Aggressive promotion
  - Methodology, training, qualifications, projects,
  - Teachers labelled as ‘native speakers’

- Mainstream tertiary, secondary, primary state education across the world (TESEP)
  - The majority of ELT
  - The largest market for BANA methodology
  - Teachers labelled as ‘non-native speakers’

- Making BANA appropriate to TESEP
Problems with the BANA-TESEP model

- Encourages a polarised view of cultural environments, systems and people

- Interested in “solving the ‘problem’ of marginalised communities”

- TESEP is by its nature imagined to be problematic
Western tradition of cultural profiling

- Objectification
  - Turning social environments into simple objects
  - Essentialist picture of culture that confines everyone to the stereotype

- West as steward discourse
  - You can only do well by learning from the West
  - ‘Well done!’
  - ‘Giving voice’ to TESEP
  - Protective, simplistic descriptions of ‘my context’

- A Western picture of collectivism
  - Pretends to be protective of group tradition
  - An image of cultural deficiency vs. always positive individualism

- A Western construction which serves globalised markets
  - Top-down globalisation

- A divisive, neo-racist cultural politics
Inevitable marginalisation

- TESEP ‘contexts’ will always be Periphery and non-Western
  - Only ever collectivist
  - Know their contexts because they are all the same
  - ‘Non-Western’ because they can be described in simplistic terms
  - Ignores the normal differences found everywhere

- BANA will always be Centre
  - Assumes its ‘freedom’ to be individualist
  - Not possible for its teachers to generalise their ‘contexts’

- Encourages native-speakerism
Critical cosmopolitan appropriate methodology

- Remove the BANA-TESEP tension
- Make methodology everywhere appropriate to everyone
- Acknowledge the communicative knowledge and intelligence that all students bring to all settings
  - Basic communicative approach
  - All the people concerned
  - Communicating with local exigencies
- Not specific to BANA or distant from TESEP
  - Any classroom, class size, institutional setting and cultural background
  - Normal difficult circumstances
- The potential for positive, creative and innovative cultural contribution across boundaries
A shift in thinking

- **From cultural disbelief**
  - That TESEP contexts have the cultural richness to contribute positively to ELT without change and development

- **To cultural belief**
  - That students and teachers everywhere have the rich cultural and linguistic experience to contribute positively
Safe houses and hidden spaces

- Learning from the margins
  - Contesting world orders, claiming centre ground

- Safe houses and hidden spaces
  - Free from surveillance. … asides between students, passing of notes, small group interactions, peer activities, marginalia in textbooks and notebooks, transition from one teacher to another, before classes begin, after classes are officially over. Outside the classroom: the canteen, library, dorms, playgroups, and computer labs. In cyberspace: email, online discussion/chat
TESEP (?) writes back

Knowledge from the margins
- Egyptian students organising their studies
- Taiwanese students practising autonomy outside the classroom
- British pupils playing with each other's language
- Chinese teachers making their own communicative curriculum

Confining TESEP and BANA structures
- Hong Kong pupils being communicative in opposition to teachers
- Kuwaiti students using English for globalised identities
- Indian teachers acknowledging the human resources of large classes
- Italian pupils playing with their migrant identities

Appropriate methodology
- Institutions, policies, resources, teaching methods, profiles, research methods, ‘context’ expectations
De-centred ethnography

- Can look around established preoccupations
  - Forgetting the TESEP 'context' profile
  - Not thinking like teachers
  - Students' vs. teachers' lessons; interaction vs. transaction
  - Remembering what it's like to be a student
  - Students as people rather than learners as operatives
  - Leaving research questions behind

- Thick description across diverse and unexpected aspects of settings
  - The backs of classrooms, corridors, meetings, personal diaries, margin scribbles, conversations, misbehaving, personal talk, friendship groups, social networking
  - Researcher memories and narratives

- Reveals unexpected, de-centred criticality
  - 'I’m not interested in planning holidays but I want to communicate with the world
The amazing potential of Web 2.0

- Squeezing Web 2.0 into a traditional Hong Kong syllabus
  - ‘Print, visual and multimodal ... pop-music culture (e.g., songs, magazines, concerts, festivals, comics, interviews with pop stars, and so on) ... especially important for young people as they go through the often difficult adolescent stage ... everyday successes and failures ... searching for their identities ... constructing their self-image, and finding their self-worth.’

- Not the technology, but what it reveals to us

- Inhibited by Institutional structures which don’t allow space
  - Empty bullet points
  - Existing curriculum
  - ‘Real progress struggles at the margins’
Social action view of culture

Cultural background
National, regional or religious ‘culture’

Cultural resources

Underlying universal processes
How we all engage with culture everywhere
Constructing and engaging with social rules and relationships

Cultural travel

- Everybody does this naturally
- But powerful C2-L2 discourse
- Statements about culture
- So may need help recognising and using cultural resources
  - Appropriate methodology
Case study

- Iranian students
  - ‘In our context we only want lectures’
  - Then they appropriate the communicative approach in their own terms

- Engage with the small culture of the communicative classroom
  - Read its politics
  - Non-compliant insurrection
  - Negotiate terms
  - Design a new classroom
  - Employ the teacher appropriately
  - Effect change on their own cultural terms

- We need to revisit their initial statements about culture
  - Essentialist culture and language discourse

- … and our own discourses of culture
  - Essentialist culture and language discourse
    - ‘They are culturally deficient”
  - West as steward discourse
    - ‘We have to train them to think’
Other references


