Educational perspectives on ELT: society and the individual; traditional, progressive and transformative

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Introduction

This chapter relates ELT to educational perspectives, specifically to curriculum concepts and philosophies of education associated with three major perspectives: "traditional" forms of education on the one hand and progressive education on the other, with transformative perspectives presented as a third optimistic view that has come into sight more clearly in recent decades in ELT. The aim of the chapter is to aid the reader to this area to develop a sophisticated understanding of ELT, which means among other things being able to see this entity from diverse viewpoints. The understanding of ELT which is targeted in this chapter concerns its broad educational aims. These relate, at an individual level, to what teachers themselves are aiming at, particularly in terms of their personal values as articulated in their philosophies of teaching. A teacher who is trying to determine what their educational values are would naturally want to become familiar with what trends or patterns in this area already exist in the wider worlds of education and ELT. As an ELT teacher educator, for some time now, in explaining this area 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 obviously likely to oversimplify —surely an area as broad as this can’t be neatly fitted into just three boxes. Some simplification for purposes of initial exposition is defensible and necessary, though let it be noted that this particular systematization of educational ideas has its own history and reflects its own cultural and historical biases, having emerged in the U.S. in the mid-20th century.

Educational perspectives on ELT means understanding ELT in light of larger movements within the field of education that have influenced it, movements which provide
overarching educational aims for any particular perspective on formal instruction. It is one main alternative at hand when we are seeking general historically-located understandings of ELT. The other most common one seeks an initial simple understanding of ELT by way of stereotypical classroom practices that have been identified by analysts of teaching “Methods”. There is some overlap in these two expository strategies. But in in this chapter, I will present trends and positions in ELT through engaging with the general question of “what is the overall educational aim, for an individual student, or for society, or more generally, of teaching English?” There can be more than one answer. And clearly, ELT teachers need to know this. They need to locate themselves in regard to such 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, and may be primarily through the disciplinary medium of applied linguistics, or by way of unsupervised apprenticeships in the private language school sector, some of us may not have been oriented explicitly to the values dimension of our work. Some entrants to the field may identify only with a narrow conception 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 & Starks, 2014).

**Traditional education in modern times**

I have mentioned that educational perspectives are to some extent related to historical periods, so let me start to unpack this idea of periods, with reference to the terms traditional and modern. The term ‘traditional’ can be useful when applied to the domain of education. It is at the same time a dangerous 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.

Common sense perspectives suggest that the present period we live in is modern times, or “modernity” (despite what post-modernists might say). Here the terms ‘modern’ and
‘modernity’ are being used in a technical sense (cf Hall, 1995). They relate particularly to the period of time characterized 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), and also to characteristic linguistic, societal, and person-related features of that entity. Language teachers should recognize that the nation-state grew up contemporaneously with the establishment of national languages, and in fact the two go hand in hand and helped each other to develop. Educational perspectives were and are driven by these powerful concepts. National languages are thought of as homogenous, and as 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, and the people within it, the individuals in question here, are considered to be (or pressed to be) basically the same, culturally. The nation-state also grew up (more or less) along with mass education. Before there was mass education, most people simply did not have any education, whereas 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 later, along with the industrial revolution, as is indicated still by many older, factory-like, school buildings. It is obvious that they 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, for it is these entities that foot the bill. Modernity also favored science over religion, and obviously, the West over any other cultures and parts of the world.

**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 U.S.A.) over other areas was attributed, at the time, to these countries’ economic base in science and industry. These were then advanced as reasons for having a good broad technical education for ordinary people, and factory-style operations were put into place to foster this, both for manufacturing and for education. Other reasons were also advanced by educational reformers concerning why a broad national education system was advisable. In some parts (Russia and Britain, for example) this was so that the poor would know their place and not be taken advantage of by rabble-rousers. In the US, at least according to President Jefferson, 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 classes would mix in a “common school” and by the late 19th century, under pressure of immigration, it was so that the newcomers would be Americanized, becoming homogenous users of one language, graduating from one education system.

Note that 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 (the original orientalists) had valued indigenous language and
culture. What became established policy, however, was the promotion of ELT, of English language and culture. This was articulated initially by Mill (1817) and more bluntly by Macaulay (1835, para. 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 (as the 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 if they wished to become citizens. Elementary and high schools made no special provision for English instructions for immigrants, but night schools had specialized classes (cf. Ross, 1937).

We can say something about methods of English teaching as reflecting aims, in this early period of ELT. In the 19th century, mass education and the industrial revolution joined to create a factory-like approach to instruction – the famous (Lancaster) monitory method, in which trained senior students repeated the drill and practice, or “recitation” from textbooks, modeling on the instructional practices of one regular teacher, and cheaply reproducing those effects on an industrial scale. For languages, this was the way that the initially Prussian method of grammar-translation (Fick, 1800, cf. Howatt, 1984, pp. 113ff.) manifested itself. That is, in language teaching, one can identify highly routinized techniques, ways into the second language via its grammatical structures and a process of translation of isolated sentences, etc., in the initial manifestations of what came to be called the grammar-translation method. 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, p. 53), while pointing out (following Rouse, 1925) that it is “not older than the nineteenth century”. 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, probably reflected this perspective as the dominant one.

The aims of this kind of education and the conceptions of the individual and of society implied by it are summarized (in the philosophy of education literature) by the technical term “essentialist”, a term coined by US (Russian-expatriate) philosopher of education Demiashkevich (1935). He referred (1935, pp. 5-6) to “the demands of social heritage... standards of the good life that are cherished by the group (tribe, caste, religious organization, or nation)...., the standards of competence set by the occupational group (trade, vocation, profession)... 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 are thus that curriculum should be determined by the needs of the “nation” (which in capitalist countries has come to be dominated by the commercial sectors) and
the target “occupational group... [or] profession”. An instrumental view of education holds -- something practical and 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 (or less satisfactorily, scores on a test of English are to be used as the primary entry criterion to advanced education and thus better jobs). 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 a form of education that will prepare individuals to take up useful employment.

If this “essentialist” perspective is still dominant today, it is also the case that it has altered a bit from the mid-20th century to the beginning of the 21st. In particular, the previously strong statist perspective – the emphasis on a unitary nation-state that education makes the citizens of -- has diminished in force and visibility, although the decline is more obvious is some countries than others. This change is signaled by increased use of the term ‘neo-liberal’ to describe aspects of capitalist economies and countries in which the private limited-stock company is the dominant form of economic organization (as opposed to publicly-owned or cooperatively-owned enterprises). What this means is that business corporations have come to see their interests as not so much identified with the nation-state as before. The free movement of capital and labor, across national boundaries, is to the advantage of businesses which themselves may be domiciled for tax purposes outside of major countries; consequently, the creation, through educational systems, of individuals who are flexible, mobile, not attached to extended families, not rooted in specific cultures or geographical areas, and not identified with one set of job-related skills but willing to learn or relearn new ones, is the target.

For countries in which English is a desirable additional language, it may be the case that it is this perspective on the individual, and learner, which begins to be manifest in curricular statements and through the universal ELT coursebook (Gray, 2013, Chun, 2013). As with 20th century forms of ELT, there is still heavy emphasis on a single form of English, teaching through emphasis on knowledge rather than use, teacher-fronted classrooms, memorization, drill and practice, and heavy use of standardized 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 form of language education.

This line of thinking and practice, in modern times, 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 form, a counter-movement in the history of ideas 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 freedom and something of an opposition to rationality; certainly an emphasis on nature, natural growth, and spirit. The visibility of these ideas in the realm of educational theory and then practice (in the simple version of this story) 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. So 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 19th century in the English-speaking world, this tradition became associated with the term “progressive”. The individual, in this tradition, more likely to be seen as a child (than an adult), 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-centered, that activity and experience (rather than lecture and drill) formed the mainstay of the curriculum, a wholistic perspective on individual development was called for, freedom or student choice rather than constraint and control was important, and education had social purpose, towards fostering democracy and equality. Not all of these matters would have been manifested in all progressive schools, and they would have been understood through 19th and early 20th century eyes rather than reflecting how we might understand them today, in the multicultural globalized 21st century, but 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 (Skidelsky, 1969), though in a minority of schools. They were most successful in the U.S. John Dewey took over the already-progressive Parker School (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 & Dewey, 19xx). This led on, through the work of the Progressive Education movement, to this perspective being instantiated, for a while, in 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, 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, discuss how they researched and organized the physical aspects of their school, and reflect on their overall ability to carry off complex organizational 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 individual, through a democratic curriculum and participatory classroom practices, students would be well-prepared to take on their civic duties when they graduated from school.

However, during World War 2 and just after, critics of progressivism (such as Bagley, 1934) were able to extinguish the more democratic elements of this educational perspective. Progressivism had always had two currents, an instrumental, scientific one, and a more social and political one. With the second in retreat, the first altered into the life adjustment curriculum of the US high school in the immediate postwar period, leading into the Cold War and the apparent falling behind of the US, as a result of Sputnik (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, p. 575). This was driven by the first flush of the scientific needs-assessment procedures (of Tyler) 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 yet these were clearly not merely the needs of business or industry.

Meanwhile, a self-aware ELT profession was developing, and progressive educational perspectives had an influence on it. The major historian of ELT, Howatt (1984, pp. 220-1, 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 (Scope, 1966) in terms of a melding of the pre-existing “EFL tradition of the linguistically organized syllabus” with the UK “primary school tradition of activity methods”. The UK primary school “tradition” (that had recently developed) looked like was certainly of international and especially US interest. Learning through doing and using, group and pair work, classrooms organized in terms of study centers, much use of teacher-produced materials, field trips, and a relaxed approach to discipline, and a generally student- or child-centered perspective characterized the best schools in this tradition. In this period, the U. S. Ford Foundation funded the Anglo-American Primary Education Project. It sent U.S. 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
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 signaled 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, a radical version of progressive education had also come into existence (right from the beginnings of the Romantic movement, 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 produced the Modern School, a small international network of schools that preserved radical political traditions along with high levels of student autonomy in small 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 U.S. Progressive Movement developed, exemplified by Counts (1932) and Rugg (1931), which 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 and that radical alternatives were needed and that teachers and education had a role to play in this transformation. This tradition is called ‘social reconstructionist’.

The Progressive Movement was a much bigger target than its left wing, the social reconstructionists, but both were attacked.. The Cold War erased most of the state manifestations of progressive and radical traditions in education in the US. Meanwhile, an avowedly socialist government took office in the UK immediately at the end of World War 2. I have already mentioned the somewhat atheoretic version of the progressive tradition which coalesced in the UK, under the heading of “informal education” (crystallized in the Plowden Report: Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967; Galton, 1987). This eventually regrouped in the US as the open classroom movement (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 sociopolitical 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 by this perspective and this implies that a teacher implementing it also has a view of society as 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 one active individual among others, but 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). These aims manifested, for ELT, a few years after Freire’s work became widely-published in English, in discussions such as Moriarty & Wallerstein (1979), and subsequently in published materials such as Auerbach & Wallerstein (1987).

What these published materials aim to do is enable adult immigrant ESL learners to raise practical issues they face in daily life, in the language classroom, and using the classroom, fellow students, and the teacher as resources, investigate the problem and the language needed to address it. Auerbach & Wallerstein’s work (for example) includes units on “the job search” (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, does 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.

**Back to the future? “Traditional” education and ELT in the 21st century**

As mentioned earlier, there is more than one “traditional” education. Besides the traditions of mass education discussed earlier, there is also indigenous education. It would be consistent with a transformative perspective on education that indigenous education should not be dismissed. Modernity certainly does dismiss, indeed tries to expunge, traditional forms and indigenous values wherever it finds them. 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.

Modernity has also been associated with the rise of the “western”, initially European nation-state. That makes “non-western” the other side of this (simplistic) dichotomy. So a comprehensive discussion here should try to also engage with non-western traditions in education. Non-western includes indigenous, but there are also traditions originally,
in a sense, indigenous, which may have been developed into urban and highly-literate forms. Thus these can be associated with the major non-Christian religions, philosophies, forms of science (Selin, 1992), civilizations and ways of life signaled 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 developed and secular world. But the perspectives implied by a phrase, say, such as Buddhist civilization, 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 (even if the present chapter has no such space).

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 “modernizing” forces of the 20th century and continue to be under great pressure in the 21st century, they are themselves not static. They duck and feint, and transform themselves, engaging with the modern world but endeavoring to remain true to their traditions even while those traditions may change. (The previous strategy, of withdrawing into the jungle or staying on the reservation is less possible in the 21st century. If anything, traditional cultures have advanced and penetrated into many modern cultures; perhaps this is part of what has rendered those cultures post-modern.)

We certainly have 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 upshot is usually a post-colonial education system rather than one which is still visibly indigenous. But at the risk of oversimplifying, a few points could be made (following Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002; Jacobs, 2013).

The indigenous viewpoint as presented in systematizations is 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. 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 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 does not lend itself to the learning of languages from outside, perhaps. On the other hand, it is clearly not necessarily 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 (cf Canagarajah & Wurr, 2011); many recognize the power of English but also its dangers. Gegeo & 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 inherited 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, “inchng 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 in even in a globalized world.

Implications for the individual teacher

What do these various perspectives mean for the individual, developing, ELT 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 (cf Crookes, 2003). Language teaching should be more than a pay-check. 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 sociocultural and thus political aspects of our countries of residence. Language teaching is a value-laden enterprise and we would do well to recognize that. It should help, conceptually, for us to notice that both the language teaching practices we deliver, engage with, have been inculcated with, themselves have values or philosophies underlying them. Even classroom practices that aren’t language-specific have morally right and morally wrong ways of being conducted. If we don’t keep our eyes open (and consult relevant literature, and talk with our peers and our mentors) about the educational underpinnings of language teaching practices, we will find ourselves obliged to implement practices we might not fully agree with. That in itself is not as bad as implementing things we haven’t even understood the intellectual or moral bases of. Conscious compromise is not as bad as sleep-walking through what should be a moral, values-based practice.

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, you might say, but the
materials for doing so are more easily available than before. What is less available than before, as work intensification and deprofessionalization proceed apace in neoliberal environments, is the time and space to support such development. It is nevertheless the right thing to do.

Future developments; 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. I think these do not necessarily favor 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 organization of their own courses.) Internet technology does also facilitate access to non-mainstream, non-dominant 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 condition of postmodernity, a term which has increasingly been subsumed under the heading of globalization, in respect to the interpenetration of cultures within and across political borders, and the non-homogeneity of institutions, from nation-state on down through school systems, to the classroom and to the village. These developments are not hospitable to the statist, homogeneity-promoting position of essentialism. So under some working conditions, a language teacher who cares to, has greater ease than before in teaching out of a values positions opposed to essentialism. Of course, the power of English and its engagement with employment-related preparation will probably allow instrumentally-oriented approaches in ELT to maintain themselves. But the possibilities for alternative positions, which I personally see as the more desirable ones, are, 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.

Further Reading
Discussion Questions

To what extent do you believe that it is the role of ELT professionals to engage in ‘transformative’ education?

To what extent does your institution focus on the individual development of learners, as posited by ‘progressive’ approaches to education?

To what extent do you agree that ELT has been somewhat detached from discussions of ‘education’, and has focused on ‘language/linguistics’ and instrumental approaches and motivations towards language learning?

What are the needs of EL learners? How do different answers to this question indicate different perspectives in ELT education? Do you focus on learners’ needs, and if so, why?

To what extent do you agree that “traditional” ELT education is actually relatively new?

Can indigenous education be transformative?

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”?

Do you have a philosophy of teaching that corresponds to any of the philosophies of schooling outlined in this chapter?
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