

Teaching English as a Missionary Language

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ABSTRACT *Surveying the massive current project of teaching English as a missionary language, this article raises concerns about the scale and cultural politics of this work, as well as issues of trust and disclosure, and the implicit support it provides for furthering the global spread of English. We discuss various responses to this work, from the Christian evangelical and Christian service positions, to the liberal agnostic, secular humanistic and critical pedagogical. Unless we engage in debate over the various moral projects tied up with English language teaching, we argue, educators will be unable to establish the grounds for our choices between missionary, liberal or critical projects.*

'Free English Class' announces a small piece of paper thrust into the hands of chosen passers-by on a city street corner. 'Sharing your ability to speak and read English can be a ministry,' announces a pamphlet lurking at the bottom of a conference bag at a major international (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) conference. 'Offering ESL [English as a Second Language] Classes is a strategic way to show the love of Christ and can open doors to sharing Christ with many who might normally not respond to more traditional methods of Evangelism,' proclaims a website of a major missionary organisation (Serving in Mission, 2002). At one end of the scale, the offer of free English classes to lure 'non-native speakers of English' off the street and into missionary English classes; at the other end of the scale, an invitation for teachers to share their knowledge of English as a ministry to the poor or to use English classes as a means to reach non-believers. All are connected by a willingness to use the global spread of English to further the spread of Christianity. All see 'English language teaching' (ELT) as a legitimate site for missionary work.

To date, there has been a massive global silence about such connections, so much so that even promoters of English language missionary work have called for the need for debate (see Tennant, 2002). One of the few to speak out on these issues has been Julian Edge (1996), who argued in a letter to *TESOL Matters* that 'taking on educational responsibilities under false pretences is utterly repellent'. For Edge, there was a clear position that as language teachers we should 'restrict the purpose of our teaching to facilitating the life purposes of our students'. He went on to argue that accusations of

linguistic and cultural imperialism are quite justified when levelled against ‘people overtly engaged in TESOL with the covert purpose of exporting their moral and/or religious certainties to the rest of the world’ (1996, p. 23). Our argument in this paper is by no means that there is no space for Christians in ELT. To the extent that Christians—or Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, or other religions—may bring a set of moral and spiritual values for discussion to the highly commercialised and rationalised world of English language teaching, they may be very welcome. Our concern is with particular forms of missionary activity, which, as far as we can tell, are growing at a considerable rate. We are now seeing a very particular and insidious constellation of views and practices that all those in ELT need to be aware of.

English language teaching is a highly political project. While national education systems often provide firm guidelines for what is considered acceptable and not acceptable in classrooms—some promoting a strong secular argument, others promoting a strong religious content—the global reach of ELT outside the state systems in which it is part of the standard curriculum results in little control over what gets taught. The recent shift in global relations, with the rampant ascendancy of an aggressively conservative, capitalist and Christian United States (supported particularly by Anglophone allies in wars against Islamic states), alongside the ever-increasing global clamour for English and its changing role in the world, has led to a new and troubling set of relations between English language teaching and Christian missionary activity. While in some ways, we can see this as merely an intensification of the colonial missionary project, in this article we want to suggest that the intensity, the practices and the message of new forms of ‘teaching English as a missionary language’ (TEML) bring new concerns to the fore that need to be addressed by the ELT community and educators more broadly. Of particular concern are:

1. The scale of this work: we have located dozens of websites concerned with TEML.
2. The cultural politics that accompany much of this teaching: while all pedagogy implies a politics, there are particular relationships between TEML and global politics.
3. The issue of trust and disclosure: a central strategy is to gain access to students through ELT and then to use this relationship to spread the Christian message.
4. The way in which TEML implicitly supports the global spread of English over other possibilities.

In the first part of this article, we give a brief overview of the nature of these activities and concerns, based on a critical analysis of websites, pamphlets and other sources.

A number of possible reactions to such Christian activity in English classes present themselves. First, obviously for some, it is righteous activity that should be supported: the Christian message is a true message and the more souls that can be saved, by fair means or foul, the better. This we shall call the Christian evangelical position. Second, for other Christians, while the mission remains the same, the ethical concerns over fair or foul means of conversion become significant, leading to an emphasis on service over proselytising (see Snow, 2001). This we shall call the Christian service position. Third, the lack of debate about these concerns suggests that many educators do not see this as a legitimate topic for discussion: what goes on in English language classrooms is of no general concern, and one set of ideological presuppositions is as good as any other. This we shall call the liberal agnostic position. Fourth, for some concerned educationalists, such as Edge, it is ‘utterly repellent’ to use English language teaching for any purpose other than the betterment of those students’ lives as defined by those students themselves.

This we shall call the secular humanist position. Finally, for other educators, classrooms are inevitably cultural and political sites, the dilemma therefore being how to justify one agenda over others. This we shall call the critical pedagogical position. The dilemmas posed by these different positions will be discussed in the second part of this paper, where we want to suggest, at the very least, a need to initiate debate over the various moral projects tied up with ELT.

ELT: 'a gold mine rich with mission opportunity'

Of course, ELT and Christian missionary activity have had a long association. While one tactic of the missionary enterprise, carried on today by organisations such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics, was to learn, use and translate the Bible into local languages, another wing has formed a close alliance between English language teaching and missionary work. Indeed, for some 19th-century writers, English and Christianity were indelibly linked. According to Read (1849, p. 48, cited in Bailey, 1991, p. 116), not only was English 'the language of the arts and sciences, of trade and commerce, of civilization and religious liberty' but it was also 'a store-house of the varied knowledge which brings a nation within the pale of civilization and Christianity ... Already it is the language of the Bible.' On the one hand, English was seen as an intrinsically Christian language—'the language of the Bible'¹—the learning of which would bring people closer to God. Indeed, the Christian celebration of the global spread of English appears to operate as a potential solution to the sin of Babel (multilingualism). On the other hand, English became the bait by which students were lured into missionary schools and classrooms.

If for no other reason than the sheer scale of TEMPL, we would argue that it needs careful attention from the broader educational community. Our own searches have revealed a vast interconnected network of missionary organisations using English language teaching as a key tool. The Mission Finder.org (2002) site offers 'Christian Missionary Opportunities to Teach English as a Second Language' and provides connections to a wide range of other organisations. A brief sample includes the following:

- *CB International* offers 'Many TESOL openings around the world, including Eastern Europe, Portugal, Spain, Madagascar' (<<http://www.cbi.org/>>).
- *Educational Resources & Referrals—China* (ERRC) proclaims, 'Over one hundred positions are now available for teachers and consultants through ERRC from more than 40 universities and research institutes in the major cities of China' (<<http://www.errchina.com/>>).
- *Educational Services International* (ESI) urges people to 'Teach English overseas in Muslim Asia, China, Russia, & Central Europe. Current opportunities in Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Czech Republic, Hungary, Russia, Ukraine' (<<http://www.teachoverseas.org/>>).
- *Frontiers*: 'Use ESL to help plant churches among unreached Muslim peoples. Work with Muslims in one of 38 countries in Asia, the Arab world, and Africa as part of a church planting team' (<<http://www.frontiers.org/>>).
- *Interserve*, which has 'many openings in several Asian countries', proclaims that 'As an international fellowship committed to serving the Christian Church, we wish to contribute directly or indirectly to the making of disciples of Jesus Christ, particularly in countries of south and central Asia, the Gulf, Middle East, and North Africa, and in other countries where there are significant groups of migrants from these countries.' It is a member of the World Evangelical Alliance (<<http://www.interserve.org/>>).

- Those who get ELT work through the *Japan English Centers Ministry* 'will be assigned to a specific local church and: Be responsible to teach English classes and English Bible Studies; Give his/her testimony in chapel times and church services; And engage in other supplemental activities so as to achieve the greatest possible impact in discipling the Japanese into the local church' (<<http://www.i-chubu.ne.jp/~i4785/jindex.htm>>).
- *TEAM* is a 'Large missions organization' that 'uses English instruction as part of church planting effort, in many countries' (<<http://www.teamworld.org/opportunities/index.html>>).
- *Vision International Alliance* (VIA) is 'Using education to teach the world for Christ'. It offers people the chance to 'Teach English for at least one year in Japan, South Korea and China. VIA provides training and generous benefits. Teachers work with local church leaders and have many opportunities to interact with students outside of the classroom ... We have an urgent need for solidly rooted Christian men and women to teach English to missionary candidates in South Korea' (<<http://www.viamission.org/teach/>>).

According to Tennant (2002), the 'Christian TESOL behemoths' (those groups with the greatest number of teaching opportunities) are: English Language Institute/China, 'which sent 500 English teachers this summer and around 400 for school-year-long teaching stints'; the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board, 'which has over 500 people teaching English around the world', and Education Services International, 'which has between 150 and 200 English teachers in its year-long program and 100 in its summer program'. Describing the 'bluntly named Evangelistic English Language Camps' run by International Messengers (IM), Tennant testifies to the success of such organisations: 'at least 10 of my friends became Christians. At the eight camps that I attended, I witnessed about 50 conversions. Each camp yields between two and seven converts. Between 20 and 25 express the desire to be involved in a Bible study. All are followed up by local churches and IM staff.'

The first points we wish to draw attention to, then, are the ubiquity of this TEML work and the candidness with which these missionary teachers and organisations discuss their operations. English teaching is being used all over the world as 'part of a church planting effort' and 'to teach English to missionary candidates'. Although the names of these organisations do not in many cases transparently announce their missionary goals, the websites are generally open and clear about their preparedness to use ELT for missionary purposes. As one organisation presents its programme,

By recognizing the escalating demand for knowledge of the English language, the staff at Christian Outreach International has discovered a gold mine rich with mission opportunity ... as your students come to trust you as their English instructor, the door is open for sharing your faith and the Gospel. Each semester many lost souls come to know the Lord. (Christian Outreach International, 2002)

For Christian Outreach International there appears to be no concern about viewing the increased demand for English as 'a gold mine rich with mission opportunity'. Nor does the question of gaining students' trust in order to preach the gospel appear to raise ethical questions about this pedagogy. According to missionaries' testimonies, English classes are the most efficient way to attract people. Indeed, for some organisations, using ELT has become an identifiable 'approach' to missionary work. As Woodward attests in his article on 'Teaching English as a tool of evangelicism' in Germany,

We can attest ... that we came into contact with more unbelievers with these English classes than we ever did with any other method. We did adult education seminars, gospel meetings, children's works, choruses, Bible correspondence courses, and camps. God blessed them all, but nothing appealed to the 'typical' German better than the English classes which we offered. (Woodward, 1993, p. 2)

Tennant (2002) supports this view: 'Start an evangelical church in Poland, and no one will come. Start an English school, and you'll make many friends.' Another organisation, Vision International Alliance (VIA), explains the importance of teaching English abroad in these terms:

English teachers are a double-edged sword in the mission field because of their great demand and their mobility. The demand is strong worldwide for native English speakers to teach nationals and many students are eager to befriend their American teachers. The demand also enables English teachers to enter countries that would otherwise be closed to Christians, interact intimately with the locals and witness Christ's grace and love through lifestyle evangelism. (Vision International Alliance, 2002)

A number of countries do not grant missionary visas, in which case missionaries apply for 'aid visas', under the title of English teachers (Diamond, 1989). As Rick Love, the international director of Frontiers, the largest Christian group in the world that focuses exclusively on proselytising to Muslims as part of a 'stealth crusade' (Yeoman, 2002b) to wipe out Islam (the website strikingly announces 'Why we love Muslims'), explains, in order to work as a missionary in Muslim countries it is often necessary to hide one's identity. Evangelists should always have a handy, non-religious explanation for their presence in Muslim countries, he explains. Before going to Indonesia, he had qualified as an English teacher: 'I could look someone in the eye and say, "I am an English teacher, I have a degree, and I'm here to teach"' (cited in Yeoman, 2002a, p. 23). As he goes on to explain, once you've developed trust, then it's time to gain new believers. But teachers should be careful not to reveal their true purpose too early. As we will argue later, this view raises not only real concerns about covert agendas, trust and disclosure, but also real worries about the ways in which an absolute belief in one's own righteousness must surely override the possibility of meaningful pedagogical engagement. Before dealing with these broader concerns, however, some mention needs to be made of teacher education for TEML, and of relationships between evangelical TEML and forms of politics.

'You Don't Learn Swimming from a Fish'

Another point of concern is the lack of qualifications of missionary English teachers. Indeed, Tennant (2002) suggests that 'the debate about credentials is much more incendiary than the one about evangelism'. This is, of course, part of a deeper problem endemic to ELT more broadly: the prevalence of untrained teachers, and the employment of 'native speaker' teachers in preference to bilingual teachers. The field of ELT has struggled for years—with only partial success—to oppose the employment of English teachers (often with no qualifications, yet on higher salaries than their local counterparts) purely on the grounds of supposed 'native speaker' abilities. When missionary English teachers offer 'free' English lessons, when churches send untrained English teachers to spread the word, these problems are immeasurably increased. According to a survey by

Dickerson and Dow (1997), while many organisations required no qualifications, only very few required more than a bare minimum of training. Christian educators, such as Tom Scovel, have proclaimed concern at such emphasis on evangelism over education, and on native speaker abilities over trained teachers, arguing that 'you don't learn swimming from a fish' (cited in Tennant, 2002). Despite the continued lack of training, a number of institutions now provide ELT education for missionary teachers, including William Carey International University, the King's College, Azusa Pacific University (APU), and Wheaton College. A nine-month qualification in 'English as a Language for Missionaries' offered by the King's College costs around US\$15,000 (King's College, 2002). The TESOL programme at APU aims specifically to combine English language teaching and missionary work:

APU's program blends service alongside educational preparation. 'Our first concern is that we train professional, qualified, bonafide teachers of English', said Richard Robison, Ph.D., director of the TESOL Program. 'The heart of the program's faculty is mission oriented. We come at this with a concern of teaching missionaries and preparing teachers.' Through their studies, students learn about language needs, sociocultural differences, and program requirements they may encounter in the teaching field. (< <http://www.apu.edu/info-cus/2001/01/tesol/> >)

The 'Course in Principles and Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language' (TEFL) at the Institute of Cross-Cultural Training at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, Illinois, has as its primary objective 'to give you the knowledge and skills that are essential for an EFL-teaching ministry' (Wheaton College, 2002). Alongside some of the standard fare of EFL teacher education, programmes such as this typically include courses such as 'using the Bible in EFL teaching' and intercultural communication, which 'will help you gain a deeper understanding of what it means to communicate the Gospel in another culture'. On the one hand, then, such programmes do at least give missionary English teachers a training in more than just missionary work. On the other hand, the evangelical base of the language teaching curriculum offers these prospective teachers little material for reflection on their practices.

'When People Are Poor, God Is Robbed of Pleasure': the gospel of prosperity

If on the one hand, then, these missionary methods of gaining trust raise serious ethical concerns, so too do the ideologies that often accompany the conservative evangelical Christian missionary work. Of course, missionary work has long been complicit with larger political and economic goals. As Diamond argues,

From the time Christ's early followers first set out 'to disciple the nations', missionary work has always been a political project. The European conquest of Latin America and Africa could not have been accomplished without missionaries ready to legitimize and soothe the bitterness of colonial subjugation. (1989, p. 205)

In Judaeo-Christian history, the word of God has most often been used as a device for 'framing one group's self-interests as beneficial for all humankind' (Lawrence, 1995, p. 107). For centuries, the Christian message has been to accept God's will and to defer earthly happiness for a better life in heaven, a discourse that has frequently been little more than an argument that the poor should accept their fate docilely. In response to the development of Christian views that used more Marxist-based analyses of in-

equality—evident particularly in liberation theology in South America and the work of educators such as Paulo Freire (1970), who encouraged the poor to take their destiny into their own hands and to rebel against their oppressors—a counter-argument within the Christian right emphasised the righteousness of wealth and capitalist accumulation: the ‘gospel of prosperity’. Haynes (1996) argues that this ‘American-promoted’ doctrine originally had as its foremost aim ‘a decidedly non-spiritual concern: the promotion and pursuit of America’s anti-communist foreign-policy goals’ (p. 226). The fall of communism did not lessen this goal; rather it produced divine justification for the righteousness of the capitalist-Christian doctrine.

‘The gospel of prosperity’ proselytised by the most active and widespread missions can be summarised in these terms:

According to the ideas associated with the ‘gospel of prosperity’, it is only right and proper—indeed, it is God’s will, that those who deserve it achieve earthly prosperity. Poverty, illness, poor health, and other misfortunes are sure signs of sin, of a lack of true Christian commitment, and God’s signal that he is aware of an individual’s personal shortcomings. It follows, in this line of reasoning, that the most devoted Christian is the most wealthy; the sight of a millionaire preacher addressing a sermon to a prosperous congregation is a material justification of such beliefs. (Haynes, 1996, p. 225)

The apostles of the ‘gospel of prosperity’ not only justify the hegemony of American neoliberalism but also ‘encourage a passive acceptance, of disasters, misfortune and a lack of social responsibility, leading to the absence of any commitment to development’ (Haynes, 1996, p. 226). This might not seem like a major divergence from the earlier gospel of acceptance, but, in the hands of conservative evangelical missionaries, God’s message becomes closely allied with the current globalising force of neoliberal ideology (see Hardt & Negri, 2000). Haynes calls this practice ‘the latest manifestation of colonialism’ whose ‘objective is not to spirit away the regions’ material resources, but rather to deflect popular political mobilisation away from seeking structural change of the society and the economy, presumably in order to serve either American strategic interests and/or financial objectives of US transnational corporations’ (1996, p. 224).

The gospel of prosperity can be found as part of many missionary organisations’ background ideology. Believers.org provides the following sample of arguments:

- When people are poor God is robbed of pleasure.
- Why did Jesus become poor? Not to set an example—but that you might become rich! The price has been paid.
- More people have financial needs than any other kind.
- Jesus talked more about money than He did heaven or hell.
- Without Bible preaching you cannot expect people to have any faith on a subject. That is the situation now with ‘God’s will is prosperity’. Instead of prosperity, the opposite lie has usually been preached: to please God and be spiritual you must be poor.
- No wonder so many Christians do not believe the will of God is their prosperity. *They have not had the prosperity seed planted.* The few that had it planted are being tempted to pull it up, because of so much negative preaching on the subject.
- The more we proclaim it, the more the Body of Christ will believe it. The more we believe it, the more we will receive God’s blessings. The more we prosper, the more we can help people, and the more God will be pleased. (Believers.org, 2001)

As Haynes points out, when such messages are promoted as part of a Christian theology by foreign missionaries who are clearly wealthier than those they seek to convert, the missionaries themselves become an embodiment of superior material values, a 'material justification of such beliefs' (1996, p. 225). As Bourdieu (1991) has argued, the power of language derives in large measure from the social power of the speaker, and thus while a service approach to missionary work suggests that good language teaching and the leading of a good Christian life give credibility to one's words, an evangelical prosperity argument suggests that it is participation in global capitalism that evinces a Christian way of life. Given that English is also frequently promoted as a language that can bring material gain, we see an unholy alliance here between English, capital and Christianity.

While on the one hand preaching a strong line in neoliberal politics, many evangelical organisations preach an equally strong line on political acquiescence. Christian Television (2002) warns us to 'Stop the Revolution' because 'one day Jesus will return and overthrow all who remain rebellious to this rule'. Stopping rebellion allows former sinners to find 'true freedom'. This doctrine emphasises acquiescence not only to the authority of God but also to the authority of state government. As one writer explains this view,

God is responsible for every government that exists upon the earth. *'There is no power but of God'*, wrote Paul, *the powers that be are ordained of God'* (Rom. 13:1). Therefore, if the Church frets itself and attempts to alter the course of earthly governments by earthly means, is the Church not actually fretting against the One who ordained those governments? ... I am grateful to God for the privilege of living in the United States of America while serving the Lord Jesus. God has graced this land with liberties which are envied by all other nations. Those liberties, however, should be seen as coming only from God, sustained only by God, and when taken away, taken away only by God. (Pioneertract, 2002)

Many of the evangelical Christian organisations in the US have long ties with other wings of the state. Diamond (1989) lists many connections between missionary organisations and the CIA. Despite a 1976 declaration to cease direct missionary/CIA cooperation, the CIA continues to be involved with missionary organisations via the State Department's Agency for International Development. In 1983, Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid expelled a Wycliffe Bible Translation/Summer Institute of Linguistics (WBT/SIL) missionary group (funded by the State Department's Agency for International Development) because of a scandal involving a Tzotzil-Spanish dictionary prepared by this group (Diamond, 1989). WBT/SIL had eliminated the Spanish and indigenous words for concepts that could potentially threaten the *status quo*: 'class', 'community', 'conquer', 'exploitation', 'bossy', 'oppression', 'repression', 'revolution', 'revolutionary', 'rebellion', the majority of which have an equivalent in the native language. As replacement for these words, WBT/SIL incorporated 'words in ideologically slanted contextual examples' such as the following:

- Right: Man has a right to punish his children when they behave poorly.
- Struggle: I'm struggling to finish this work soon.
- Boss: The boss is good. He treats us well and pays us a good wage. (Diamond, 1989, p. 219)

A central concern here is that as the US turns further and further away from its supposed separation of church and state, and instead embeds fundamentalist right-wing Christian doctrine as part of both internal and external policy, the role of Christian missionaries

becomes indelibly tied to the promotion of a particular version of money, religion and politics, and the foreign policy of the US becomes tied to a particular vision of Christian expansion. As Hardt and Negri (2000) point out in their discussion of new forms of empire, the claims of fundamentalist Christians to promote 'traditional family values' are not based on any real past but rather are 'a new invention that is part of a political project against the contemporary social order' (p. 148). Nowhere is this more apparent than with the current incumbent of the White House: 'George W. Bush is a man after God's own heart. He is a man who lives in Christ, and obeys God ... We believe George W. Bush is a merciful gift from the Lord to an undeserving people. We ask you to join us in constant prayer for our President, his family, his administration, and his country. Constant prayer ... urgent prayer ... prayer that brings revival to America' (pray4Bush.com, 2002). Bush himself has made alarming claims:

When questioned further regarding his personal beliefs Bush responded, 'Now don't get me wrong, folks, the Muslims and Jews are gonna burn in hell forever, along with everyone else who doesn't believe in Jesus, mother's bleeding-heart universalism notwithstanding'. He continued, 'I've said as much to the press before, and I stand by those words', evidently referring to the October 1994 interview in the Houston Post. 'Especially atheists. My daddy taught me atheists should not be considered patriots, or even citizens. This is one nation under God, damn it!' (Oklahoma Atheists, 2001)

As the *New Internationalist* puts it, the 'Christian Right has never been so close to power as it is under the bible-brandishing regime of George W Bush. And within this earnest collection of the god-fearing, John Ashcroft sits closest to the throne' (2002, p. 29). What is worrying about an attorney general with extreme Christian views is not only his conservative political agenda: 'anti-tax, anti-abortion, anti-AIDS funding, anti-gay rights, anti public arts funding. In fact, "anti" just about everything except those old-time, love-your-neighbour Christian issues: the death penalty and the freedom to bear arms' (2002, p. 29). Of greater concern in the larger picture is the belief that such things as 'American freedoms' are granted by God rather than secular, legal bodies (in particular the US constitution). Our point here is that it is this central belief in a natural state of things that stems from God, which is therefore unquestionable, that is the most dangerous as a fundamentalist belief. When coupled with an English language teaching project, it is this unquestioning belief in God-given conditions, coupled to a highly conservative agenda, that presents a serious threat to the world.

Our concern here is not merely to reiterate the well-known problems with the power of the extreme Christian Right in the US—promoting creationism, inequality, homophobia and militarism, and denying the significance of evolution, welfare, intellectual activity and the right to be different—but to draw attention to the close connections between Christian missionary activity, the Right and ELT. According to Lienesch (1993, p. 23), 'at the center of Christian conservative thinking, shaping its sense of itself, is the concept of Conversion, the act of faith and forgiveness through which sinners are brought from sin into a state of everlasting salvation'. What we are suggesting, then, is that within this wing of Christian evangelical ELT, divine justification is provided for conversion, capitalism and conservatism. A particular vision of globalisation, neoliberal values and capitalist accumulation is celebrated as part of a missionary message. By using ELT as a cover for their activity, by promoting at the same time a very particular set of beliefs about the world and by focusing particularly on Islamic and (former) communist regions of the world, these ambassadors of global capital and neoliberal politics may do more

damage through their political views than through their so-called Christian message. English is already problematically tied in many contexts to images of modernity, development and prosperity, leading to many broken dreams and unfortunate language policies. A package of English, Christianity, neoliberalism and wealth has even more insidious implications.

English as Christian Service

So far, we have tried to illustrate the extent of global missionary English language teaching, and some of the deeply problematic conjunctions between evangelical missionary activity and particular forms of politics. This latter evangelical position is not the only mode of TEML activity. As we suggested in the introduction, a slightly different approach emphasises the notion of Christian service. In his recent book on *English Teaching as Christian Mission*, Snow (2001) argues that there are two broad approaches to TEML (Snow prefers the term 'Christian English teachers', CET). On the one hand is the conservative evangelical, which has as its central goal the conversion of non-believers: it is teaching English *for* missionary purposes; and its successes may be counted in souls rather than sentence structures. As Snow points out, this evangelical wing of TEML runs the danger of working with too great a gap between its avowed and real purposes (ELT and evangelicism), 'and whenever a gap develops between this stated agenda and a second Christian agenda being pursued by a CET, the issue of integrity becomes problematic' (2001, p. 70). On the other hand, there is the more liberal Christian service approach to missionary work, which sees ELT as missionary work in itself: this is teaching English *as* missionary purpose; it measures its success in terms of service and sentence structures rather than souls. Or at least, if like all missionary work its ultimate goal is the saving of souls, it at least promotes good English teaching as a means to that goal rather than merely using English as a means of access.

Snow (2001) argues that by showing themselves to be willing to learn other languages and cultures ('learning as witness'), by teaching well and conducting themselves as good Christians ('teaching as witness'), by helping students and working with compassion ('teaching as ministry') and by teaching English in order to help people meet their needs ('teaching as service'), Christian English teachers (CETs) can show the love of God through their work as English teachers. He concludes,

For Christians in mission, English teaching can and should be much more than an opportunity to gain access to closed nations for evangelistic purposes, or a form of social work only incidentally carried out by Christians. It can be an opportunity to bear witness, to minister, to serve the disadvantaged, to contribute toward peace between people of different cultures, and even to build better relations between different branches of the church universal. Looked at in these ways, English teaching can be more than a secular job that serves as a means to other ends—English teaching itself becomes a form of Christian mission. (2001, pp. 176–177)

This line of argument is different on various levels from the evangelical version of TEML. First, it puts emphasis on disclosure. Thus, in light of the problem that 'the more CETs mislead others as to their true intentions in accepting a teaching position, the more their integrity is compromised and the luster of their witness tarnished' (2001, p. 71), Snow argues that 'CETs can and should be open and forthright about their faith in class as the occasion arises' (p. 81). Second, it renders the teaching process itself as more than

merely incidental to missionary work: 'the quality of CETs' teaching work is the primary vehicle through which they share the love of God with their students, and also the strongest and clearest statement they make about what a Christian should be like' (p. 65). And third, it argues that giving the less advantaged (the poor) better access to English should be a crucial part of missionary work: 'English teaching is a service that makes a significant impact on people's ability to meet very concrete needs, and in this sense can and should be considered a ministry of compassion' (p. 107). Furthermore, this should be aimed both at poorer countries and disenfranchised people within those countries: 'If Western Christians wish the overall impact of their mission service to reflect the model presented by Jesus' ministry, service to the poor needs to be a prominent part of the overall effort' (p. 108).

Scovel (in Snow, 2001) sums up this position in his foreword to Snow's book: 'Teaching English is vital contribution to our students and is a substantive mission wherever we may be, but as Christian English teachers, hopefully we teach more than the language, and in doing that we have the opportunity to profess our faith' (p. 12). Although Snow's distinction is a useful one, and the apparent commitment to both good teaching² and a form of emancipatory education aimed at the disenfranchised appears ethically preferable to the evangelical position, there are also grounds for circumspection here. While the evangelical missionary stance often seems to project a somewhat triumphalist position on the global spread of English (the spread of English being seen, like 'democracy', Christianity and global capital, as something to be celebrated), its main interest in English is as a means to gain access to potential converts. It is not surprising, therefore, that in none of the material we reviewed³ is the 'escalating demand for knowledge of the English language' questioned. Rather, the global spread of English is taken as a given that can be used to gain students' trust. According to information about Azusa Pacific University's TESOL programme,

English is the most taught language in 100 countries and maintains official status in 70 countries, making English teachers in high demand. When the Christian College Consortium realized the importance of equipping bivocational, overseas missionaries to teach English to meet this demand, they found APU was an ideal place to start. (Azusa Pacific University, 2001)

From the Christian service point of view, by contrast, teaching English is seen as fulfilling the needs of those being taught. But, as Snow acknowledges, 'improved English skills sometimes serve as a ticket that enables individuals to escape the difficulties of their social setting rather than as a tool with which they better the situation of their group' (2001, p. 118). In a world in which access to and knowledge of English has become one of the major distributors of social, cultural and economic capital, it is hard to sustain an argument that English teaching is akin to other forms of service. While many forms of charity or voluntary work are themselves problematic (sustaining, as they do, inequitable social conditions, and allowing authorities to overlook social, economic and environmental conditions), to argue for ELT as a form of Christian service is to promote a potentially destructive role for English.

On the one hand, this view suggests that better access to English can be a solution to global inequalities. This is surely not the case. The potential benefits or disadvantages that may derive from teaching English need to be understood contextually. As Bruthiaux (2002) argues,

For deeply poor populations in many countries, education of the most basic type remains a pipe dream, and English language education an outlandish

irrelevance. In a world where, it is said, half the population has never made a telephone call, talk of a role for English language education in facilitating the process of poverty reduction and a major allocation of public resources to that end is likely to prove misguided and wasteful. (2002, pp. 292–293)

Once ELT becomes constructed in itself as a form of Christian service, it is also too easy for the promotion of ELT to be driven by missionary fervour rather than educational need. On the other hand, this view turns the teaching of English into a holy activity itself. Indeed, as Earl Stevick⁴—described by Scovel (cited in Tennant, 2002) as ‘the Moses of the field’—puts it, ‘Teaching English is walking on holy ground.’ When we return, then, to one of those thorny questions around the agencies and ideologies of the global spread of English (why is English spread? and what potential messages may it carry?), we can find here a domain-specific answer to this: while demand for English already exists in many of these contexts, EML teachers have both a strong interest in maintaining and increasing that demand and in using it to promote a particular set of beliefs.

At its core, furthermore, there is surely something disingenuous about the Christian service argument, for while it highlights social salvation through ELT, the underlying hope is still that spiritual salvation can be achieved through Christianity. While one part of the argument may rest simply on the personal salvation of the missionary teachers themselves—by teaching English as a Christian service one is booking a place in heaven for oneself—the project remains a missionary one. Despite all the talk here of peace, intercultural understanding, the acceptance of difference, witnessing, serving, and ministering, English teaching as Christian mission remains a project devoted to the promotion (‘sharing’) of a particular set of ideologies and beliefs based on supposedly external criteria (God, the Bible, etc.) that give them validity. While the service position suggests that all CETs should be open about their work, it remains at heart a continuation of the colonial attitude to the non-believing Other. It is to arguments about disclosure and the ethics of TEML that we now turn.

‘Whose Ethics Are We Talking about?’

So much, then, for the Christian evangelical and Christian service arguments, their problematic links to particular ideological formations, the concerns about disclosure and using English as a means to gain access to non-Christians, and their deep interests in promoting the spread of English as either a means or an end of their work. On these grounds alone there are good reasons to oppose a great deal of TEML activity. But how do we construct an ethical argument for a preferred ELT content? This we shall try to do in the final section of the article. Before doing so, however, it is worth pointing out why we need to do so, a discussion that will touch briefly on two alternative positions, the liberal agnostic and the secular humanist. Arguing largely from the latter position, Edge (1996), as we saw in the introduction, argued that teaching English while operating with a different, covert agenda was ‘utterly repellent’. Earl Stevick (1996–1997) responded to Edge’s letter, drawing a distinction between exporting ideas in such a manner as to ‘force or pressure other people to accept’ and presenting new ideas as ‘attractive and available in a free market’. For Stevick, the former is unacceptable but there is ‘nothing sinister in the latter’ (p. 6).

Yet this argument is surely also disingenuous. Christian missionary work typically preys on the weak, using English to gain access to vulnerable non-Christians: ‘Teaching English to migrants’, suggests Dennett (1992, p. 91) ‘presents a wonderful opportunity for

ministry'. Christians in Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) classes in Australia 'can ask to be allotted to Muslim families. Migrant women are usually home alone all day with little outside contact. There is no way for them to learn the language of their new country. This provides Christian women of any age with the means of getting close to these needy people and, eventually, sharing the gospel with them' (pp. 91–92). Such missionary work, furthermore, is by no means limited to those we might see as capable of evaluating ideas in a free market. According to a report by missionaries recently returned from China, they are planning to return soon: 'We will teach English to Chinese students between the ages of 10 and 18 for six weeks in July and August.' On their last visit, they tell us, 'over 350 students heard the Gospel' and the principal of the school admired their dedication even though, as he explained, 'I don't understand what they were talking about but I knew it was something very deep and very special' (missionary testimony on Mission Finder.org [2002]). It is surely one thing to use ELT with adults as a means to spread Christianity, and quite another to do this with school children. And it is also worth observing here how the use of English can conceal the nature of the activity from authorities. It is unclear, therefore, whether a distinction between pressuring people and making ideas available in a free market is in any way sustainable, particularly in the context of ELT.

Stevick's (1996–1997) response, then, is unconvincing. While arguing for the right to promote Christianity, he also invokes a free-market liberal ideology in which people are at liberty to choose between different ideas. At the very least, we would need to explore questions of coercion and the curriculum, rather than trying to maintain a distinction between force and the free market. Edge's (1996) position, by contrast, along with very similar concerns to those we have already discussed about the lack of disclosure and the ideological base of evangelical work, centres on the rights of students to get the education they signed up for. This is a significant argument, yet it also raises concerns about how we justify critical educational projects. As Auerbach (1995) argues, 'Pedagogical choices about curriculum development, content, materials, classroom processes, and language use, although appearing to be informed by apolitical professional considerations, are, in fact, inherently ideological in nature' (1995, p. 9). From a critical perspective, teaching is never ideologically neutral. And since the force of ideological persuasion in education generally is massively towards liberal-conservative positions, critical (feminist, anti-racist, and so forth) educators see themselves as well justified in promoting their own critical agendas. The crucial question, therefore, is this: If both critical educators and Christian educators promote forms of transformative pedagogy, on what grounds can we distinguish between a critical pedagogical project aimed at forms of social change, and a Christian missionary project aimed at conversion?

This is a challenge often raised against proponents of critical approaches (critical literacy, critical pedagogy, etc.) in education: If one is prepared to argue for the right to pursue a political agenda in education, must this necessarily also include the right for all political agendas to be pursued? Thus, if we eschew a vision of education as a neutral activity, how can we justify certain forms of political activity within ELT and condemn others? Arguing the liberal agnostic line, Henry Widdowson (2001) has expressed this concern in his discussion of critical approaches to education:

Whose ethics are we talking about? Whose morals? And how can you tell a worthy cause from an unworthy one? Critical people, like missionaries, seem to be fairly confident that they have identified what is good for other people on the basis of their own beliefs. But by making a virtue of the necessity of

partiality we in effect deny plurality and impose our own version of reality, thereby exercising the power of authority which we claim to deplore. (2001, p. 15)

Is Widdowson right that critical literacy or critical pedagogy is indistinguishable from missionary activity by dint of its emphasis on partiality over plurality? Does this become only a question of personal and political preference or are there ways in which we can construct an argument in favour of certain forms of political pedagogy over others? This is a challenge we take up in the final section of this article.

Conclusion: towards a situated ethics of ELT

These questions, then, lead us to confront crucial questions about ethical practice and ELT (and, indeed, all forms of education). There are two domains to this. First, if we accept that all teaching is political, on what grounds can we establish certain politics over others? And second, how can we establish ethical practice in ELT? We are suggesting therefore that the prevalence of TEMPL forces us to confront ethical questions to do with preferred futures and pedagogies. Applied linguistics and TESOL have a limited basis for pursuing such questions. There has been discussion of ethics in research and language testing, but this has been almost exclusively limited to arguments that look only at improving practice (achieving greater validity in language tests, for example) rather than pursuing questions about the broader ethics of what we are engaged in. Attempting to come to terms with this gap, Gee (1993) has argued that we eventually have to confront 'two conceptual principles that serve as the basis of *ethical human discourse* (talk and interaction)' (p. 292): 'That something would *harm* someone else ... is *always* a good reason (though perhaps not a sufficient reason) *not* to do it' (Gee, 1993, p. 292) and 'One always has the ethical obligation to explicate ... any social practice that there is reason to believe advantages oneself or one's group over other people or groups' (p. 293). Arguing a similar case, Corson (1997) suggests three basic ethical principles drawn from moral philosophy: the principle of respect for persons (compare Gee's first principle); the principle of equal treatment (compare Gee's second principle); and the principle of benefit maximisation (a more utilitarian concern with the consequences of actions).

Such broad ethical considerations are only useful up to a point, however. Ultimately, we have to ground such abstractions in local, situated ethical arguments. We will here suggest four such arguments for certain forms of pedagogical and political engagement over TEMPL practices. These arguments have to do with trust and disclosure, respect for others, political contexts, and ethical options. First, it does appear crucial to return here to questions of concealment and trust. If the sole or central purpose of one's pedagogy is concealed, and one is only teaching in order to gain access to students, there is surely a major ethical concern of trust. For other forms of political pedagogy, then, there is an onus here on the ethical imperative of disclosure. In order to distinguish themselves from EML teachers, critical educators need to embrace an ethics of disclosure. Second, there is an argument in terms of respect. Any good critical approach to ELT must start from a position of respect and engagement with students' cultures and ideas. This is why the concept of voice has been so central in certain versions of critical pedagogy, or why Auerbach (1995) insists on *participatory* action research: the point is not to convince students they are wrong, and to indoctrinate them with a preferred ideology, but rather to find ways of bringing them to a critical engagement with the ways in which their lives are constructed. Here too, then, is an important lesson for any critical educational

approach: in order to distinguish itself in ethico-pedagogical terms from missionary pedagogy, it needs to consider its modes of engagement very seriously.

Third, politically, there are important reasons to prefer critical pedagogy over missionary pedagogy. As argued elsewhere (see Pennycook, 2001), critical approaches to ELT are very different from domains such as critical thinking, which generally lay claim to political neutrality. Critical ELT (and other domains of critical applied linguistics) is committed to a particular form of politics. There is certainly a wide range of diversity within this work, but generally we would argue it is committed overall to three main concerns: questions of disparity, difference and desire. The first has to do with access and disadvantage: how to understand and overcome inequalities in access. The second has to do with inclusion: how to include and yet engage with forms of social and cultural difference. The third has to do with change: how to create possibilities for alternative futures. Now clearly it is possible to engage in Christian (or other religion-based) pedagogies that also deal with such concerns—Paulo Freire's mixture of Marxism, humanism and Christianity is an obvious example—but once the mission becomes to spread Christianity itself, and particularly when that message becomes conflated with right-wing politics, we are dealing with a project always more oriented towards the opposites of disparity, difference and desire: conformity, conservatism and coercion.

Even if the political preferability of the concerns of disparity, difference and desire cannot be established in the abstract over conformity, conservatism and coercion, they can be argued for in the current political context. We are living in difficult times. Communist totalitarianism no longer acts as a counterbalance to neoliberal totalitarianism. And recent events—particularly the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001—have escalated a perceived struggle between Christianity and Islam, so much so that the US-inspired 'war against terrorism' has all too often looked like a war against Islam. George W. Bush's early pronouncements of a 'crusade' were of course indicative of this attitude. As we noted above, while TEML is global in its objectives, a major current focus of missionary work is on the 'non-believers' of Islam and former communist societies. In light of this current climate, and in light of the current role English plays in relation to forms of globalisation, we would argue that using English as a means to attempt to convert Muslims and those in former communist countries, and doing so within a moral and political framework that promotes neoliberalism and global capitalism, is politically indefensible.

And finally, we want to suggest that the moral project of TEML all too often lacks an adequate ethics. While religious thinking is supposed to encourage engagement with hard ethical questions, all too often it does little more than promote a prior moral absolutism. By this we mean that this approach to thought and education operates with an overarching moral position that does not allow for ethical response. Roger Simon (1992) argues for an educational vision that is 'capable of narrating stories of possibility' yet 'constrained within an ethical imagination that privileges diversity, compassionate justice, and securing of the conditions for the renewal of human life' (p. 30). What Simon is arguing for here is not a morality that exists outside human relations in a pre-given religious code, but 'the ethical demand to imagine *otherwise*' (Kearney, 1988, p. 364). To the extent that TEML all too often lacks such a vision and promotes only its own a priori morality, it fails as an ethical project. And once again, this raises an important challenge for critical educators. If forms of critical pedagogy are promoted only as regurgitated political dogma, they are as indefensible ethically as forms of TEML: critical approaches to language education need to engage ethically.

We do not want to propose global monitoring of ELT classes—even if this were

possible—nor that all classes should attempt to be culturally or politically neutral. We are not trying to suggest that the ELT classroom should never be a place for the discussion or presentation of moral and political views. Indeed, as we suggested above, it is always, inevitably, precisely that. But we do want to suggest that we need frameworks for considering how ELT is being used to promote particular positions. And we do feel that all ELT that promotes the global spread of English with missionary zeal—whether this is part of a missionary project or not—needs to confront hard questions about the global role of English. Our concerns about the ethics of TEMPL also raise serious questions for the ethics of critical pedagogy and literacy. But unless we can start to engage in a debate over these concerns, to start to discuss the various moral projects tied up with ELT, we will be left with a critical left that believes in its own political rectitude, a religious right that believes in its God-given agenda, and a large liberal middle that erroneously believes that all of this can be kept out of the classroom.

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NOTES

1. A popular story cites various public figures from the southern USA as opposing bilingual education on the grounds that 'If English was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me' (also cited as 'good enough for Texans', 'good enough for them Mexicans', etc.). The most reliable source for this appears to be a Texan senator, either Ma or James Ferguson in the early decades of the 20th century (though it has also been attributed to a priest in Little Rock, Arkansas, and various other sources). See for example <http://www.austinchronicle.com/issues/dispatch/2002-06-14/pols_capitol.html>.
2. There is also here and elsewhere a disconcerting assumption that both 'good teaching' and providing good models of intercultural communication, ethical practice, concern for others and so on are a Christian prerogative. Many others, both religious and non-religious, may also aspire to these ideals, leaving us with the intriguing question of whether all teachers who teach well and are committed to working with the poor are acting as witnesses to God—whether they believe so or not.
3. Snow (2001), however, while arguing for the role of ELT as a Christian service to the disadvantaged, does include a discussion of the various arguments expressing concern over the global spread of English.
4. Stevick is also cited on the back cover of Snow's (2001) book: 'I wish we had had this book then! Looking back over the last half-century of being a Christian English teacher and training others to be the same, Snow's treatment rings true.' Other TESOL luminaries involved include Tom Scovel, who wrote the foreword.

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