Chapter 19: Appropriate methodology: towards a cosmopolitan approach

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Introduction

An early rationale for appropriate methodology, as expressed in the (1994) publication of *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*, was a suggested conflict between two educational domains. On the one side was the largely private ELT sector originating in Britain, Australasia and North American (BANA). This was perceived to be an aggressive promoter of a particular and narrow interpretation of communicative teaching methodology through teacher training and education, international professional qualifications, curriculum projects and the prolific international publishing of textbooks (see Gray, and Pennycook, this volume). BANA also directly or indirectly promoted the so-called 'native speaker' teacher to be the best model both for teaching methodology and language (see Llurda, this volume). On the other side was the mainstream tertiary, secondary, primary state education across the world (TESEP), where the majority of ELT takes place. This is perhaps the largest market for BANA methodology; and the majority of teachers are so-called 'non-native speakers'. The appropriate methodology quest was therefore to make BANA methodology appropriate to TESEP. A political dimension to this quest was the potential linguistic imperialism implicit in the domination of the BANA domain, which Phillipson (1992) describes as the West maintaining power over the rest of the world through the power of English and a false idea that the 'native speaker' is superior. (I use inverted commas here and throughout to remind us that the native-non-native speaker division is highly contested; again, see Llurda, this volume).

In assessing the concept of appropriate methodology, this chapter will evaluate the validity of this original BANA-TESEP model in the light of developing understandings of the cultural politics of ELT. It will suggest that, rather than focusing on distinct social or cultural TESEP contexts, there needs to be a more cosmopolitan model in which learning and teaching methodology is appropriate to the lived experience of *all* language learners and teachers *regardless* of whether they come from so-called BANA or TESEP backgrounds. It will suggest that, rather than being driven by what appears to be a 'centred' BANA perception of the ELT world, appropriate methodology needs to be 'de-centred' in the often-unrecognised worlds of language learners and teachers. I will begin

by looking at the issues with the BANA-TESEP model and then move to the arguments for a more cosmopolitan model. **[end of page 265]**

Problems with the BANA-TESEP model

The problem with the original BANA-TESEP model of appropriate methodology was signalled in Canagarajah's review of *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*. He argued that it was designed to help BANA ELT professionals to solve the 'problem' of TESEP, as though they were a Centre, Western power speaking down to 'Periphery' communities (1996: 81-2). The reference here to 'the West' is not a particular geographical place, but to an idea inferring 'developed' and 'desirable' (Hall, 1996: 186). A useful definition of Centre is a location of power that always defines, whereas the Periphery is subjugated to this power by always being defined (Hannerz, 1991). This therefore means that, while the intention might be an innocent application of BANA methods to make ELT more effective in TESEP settings (e.g. Waters, 2007), there is a hidden politics in which TESEP is defined by BANA as a series of simplistic descriptions of national 'contexts' which only focus on problems. In effect, a culturally idealised BANA Others (i.e. reduces) TESEP 'contexts' to descriptions of cultural deficiency.

An association with an essentialised notion of non-Western national cultures has fed this image of TESEP deficiency. Essentialism here refers to view of culture that completely encases and defines the individual within it. There is continued recognition within critical applied linguistics of how this essentialism has been built around exaggerated and simplistic association between collectivism, 'non-native speakers' a lack of the self-directed autonomy that is thought to characterise successful ELT (Holliday, 2005; Kubota and Lin, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Nayar, 2002; also, Llurda, this volume). It is thus easily imagined that all the students and teachers who inhabit so-called TESEP 'contexts', most often framed as national cultures, have the same values, attitudes, practices, cultural preferences and behaviours, often ignoring the normal, expected differences in sector, institution, classroom makeup, teacher and student personality, individual classroom politics and so on. A consequence of this, in my personal experience, is that TESEP teachers often describe their contexts through national cultural generalities at conferences and in postgraduate assignments, and are just assumed to 'know' everything about their national culture (a problematic concept in itself) because they are insiders. Acceptance of the unitary simplicity of these contexts means that there is no apparent need to challenge generalisations about them. It is an inconvenient truth that often cited issues with class size, examinations, timetabling, teacher status, ministries, motivation and so on are often common to particular educational *sectors* in many parts of the world rather than to particular *places*. The implacability of this cultural politics is demonstrated when TESEP contexts anywhere in the world become 'non-Western' by virtue of being describable in simplistic terms. It is therefore how ELT professionals talk and think of or construct themselves and others, rather than who they might really be, that is the problem here.

BANA's strong association with individualism is presented as the ideal for the person-interactive classroom. It also claims the exclusive, superior and arrogant 'freedom' for people to be different to each other and have different views about things (Holliday, 2013: 70). This characterisation and positioning of BANA will always take on a Centre, Western identity. It is therefore not possible for British, American or Australian teachers to describe *their* own 'contexts' in simplistic generalised terms; the BANA default is individuality. Yet, at the same time, TESEP 'contexts' are only ever thought to be collectivist and must always therefore fail to attain this BANA ideal. This Othering of TESEP represents a long-standing, dominant Western marginalisation of world cultures that serves globalised markets (e.g. Hall, 1996; see Gray, and Pennycook, this volume). This divisive cultural politics, hidden beneath a rhetoric of celebrating diversity, resembles a broader 'West as steward' discourse (Holliday, 2013: 110, 14) in which a deep sense of welcoming well-wishing is nevertheless patronising to the extent of thinking that only by being in the West or learning from the West can non-Western outsiders do well. **[end of page 266]**

It would however be a mistake to think that this polarised politics is represented by two distinct groups of actual people – those who are 'Western' versus those who are 'non-Western'. BANA is no longer a specific group of British, Australasian and North American professionals and their practices. It is rather a dominant, Centre, global professional discourse, a way or representing ideas (Hall, 1996: 187), which constructs particular ELT practices as a superior force, and is subscribed to in varying degrees by professionals everywhere. It is driven by the ideology of native-speakerism (i.e. the belief in the superiority of Western English and teaching methodology) that is also not particularly associated with its original BANA location (Holliday, 2005; Houghton and Rivers, 2013: 6). It is certainly not the case that all teachers who are labelled as 'native speakers' are native-speakerists. Native-speakerism is to greater or lesser extent subscribed to across the world both in professional and popular belief – from Asian American teachers being labelled 'non-native speakers' by employers in the UAE because they are not 'white' (Ali, 2009: 39), to the proliferation of newspaper advertisements in Mexico which sell language schools by how many 'native speaker' teachers they have (Lengeling and Mora Pablo, 2012; see also Kramsch and Zhu Hua, this volume).

A critical cosmopolitan appropriate methodology

The rest of this chapter will consider how this divisive cultural politics can only be undone by somehow removing the BANA-TESEP tension and seeking to make methodology everywhere potentially appropriate to language learners and their teachers everywhere. This means moving away from the narrow communicative method originally associated with BANA, that has advocated a particular and culture-specific type of oral interaction, and looking at deeper communicative principles – capitalising on the immense 'communicative knowledge' and intelligence which all students bring to the classroom (Breen and Candlin, 1980: 93). Hence, important 'macrostrategies' for communicative teaching include utilise 'learning opportunities *created by* learners' and activating their *existing*

'intuitive heuristics', or models of making sense of the world (Kumaravadivelu, 1993: 13-14, my emphasis). Also, this communicative curriculum should apply not only to students but to all the people concerned, which includes teachers because they are a part of the learning process as they carry out the informal research to enable them to 'communicate' with what their students bring to the classroom (Hutchinson and Waters, 1984).

An appropriate methodology that follows this principle is by no means specific to BANA or distant from TESEP. It is an educational approach that can relate to any classroom, class size, institutional setting, cultural background and subject of study. As well as relating to the existing communicative knowledge and intelligence of students, it must relate to their existing cultural experience and also to that of their teachers and the other parties concerned and their communities. It is this relationship that gives authentic meaning to the educational process rather than any imagined BANA criterion.

This revised appropriate methodology that seeks to build on the intelligence and existing communicative and cultural experience of all students everywhere can be related to a critical cosmopolitan sociology which recognises the potential for the positive, creative and innovative contribution across cultural boundaries (Delanty, 2006). It is *critical* of the traditional essentialism which imagines solid and objectified national cultures such as those represented in TESEP 'contexts'. It is *cosmopolitan* in that it could relate to any sort of ELT setting anywhere in the world, from inner-city state education in London to private language institutes in China. It also resonates with a social action model of culture that emphasises a creative dialogue between individuals and the structures of their societies that makes their existing cultural experience sufficiently dynamic to engage across boundaries (Holliday, 2013; Weber, 1964). **[end of page 267]**

A major task within this critical cosmopolitan approach is to bring about a shift:

- *From cultural disbelief* that TESEP contexts have the cultural richness to contribute positively to English language learning without change and the development of critical thinking and autonomy
- *Towards a cultural belief* – that the cultural backgrounds of all language learners and teachers have the richness to provide them with the linguistic and cultural experience to contribute positively to English language learning.

To recap, the emphasis here is to move away from an appropriate methodology that seeks to solve the problem of introducing BANA methods to TESEP contexts. It instead seeks to serve the intelligence and communicative and cultural experience of all students, and their teachers, in all settings. I shall first look at the case of students and then at the case of their teachers.

The worlds of students – 'I am not what you think I am'

Belief in the contribution of the existing communicative and cultural experience of our students, whatever their backgrounds, requires finding out what this contribution is. This might not be an easy task because their cultural backgrounds may be unrecognised

and hidden by the dominant Western, and indeed BANA view of who they are – that if they are non-Western they are likely to have restrictive collectivist cultures and therefore have little to offer. A cosmopolitan appropriate methodology therefore needs to be underpinned by a research methodology that is equipped to fathom the marginal nature of hidden sites of learning. It needs to be de-centred, without the agenda of whether or not a Centre, Western BANA method is appropriate. It has to see around dominant preoccupations and prejudices that have Othered TESEP, and needs to incorporate localised perspectives and to ask questions that seek out the unexpected. Ethnographic approaches are common here because they apply the disciplines of making the familiar strange and putting aside established prejudices, and are set up to appreciate unrecognised cultural realities in the lived experiences of students and teachers (Holliday, 2014). Much of the research into the worlds of students follows this approach.

'I am not what you think I am' is a statement from one of the participants in Yamchi's (2015) qualitative study of Emirati women college students' experience of academic writing. The statement indicates that the student is aware that her teachers do not recognise what she brings to the classroom. Yamchi finds that only when her students talk to her outside the classroom about how they deal with the formal tasks of the writing curriculum do they demonstrate high degrees of criticality that have remained invisible inside the classroom. While in the classroom they appear uncritical while going through the motions of writing tasks that they do not feel ownership for, outside the classroom they speak critically about the politics of the writing tasks. The student's statement therefore epitomises how what we need to learn from our students is often hidden and very different from what we as teachers imagine about them.

An appropriate methodology that searches out and recognises the cultural contribution of students in this way can be labelled as cosmopolitan because these contributions cross the cultural boundaries that have been dominant in the BANA-TESEP model. Becoming aware of hitherto hidden cultural contribution will also undoubtedly change teachers' classroom and other practice as their students, rather than BANA ideals, become their main resource.

That the most important aspects of what we need to know about our students have remained at the margins of the formal aspects of learning and teaching resonates with Canagarajah's (1996) **[end of page 268]** reference to the Periphery being ignored by the original BANA-TESEP model. It is the margins that are the key to a cosmopolitan appropriate methodology because, as Hall maintains, the margins are in the process of contesting world orders as they struggle to occupy centre ground (1991: 53). It is at the margins that we can find out what makes English meaningful to the lives of language learners and what they therefore bring to the learning event. The 'we' here no longer refers to BANA teachers learning about TESEP students, but to all of us appreciating the unexpected qualities of our students.

These hidden, marginalised qualities can be found in activities that are out of sight of the formal aspects of lessons and institutional assessment, but that are essentially cosmopolitan in the way in which they relate to the wider world. They are the things that students get on with "relatively free from surveillance" (Canagarajah, 2004: 121).

They include such things as "asides between students, passing of notes, small group interactions, peer activities, marginalia in textbooks and notebooks, transition from one teacher to another, before classes begin, after classes are officially over". They take place in "the canteen, library, dorms, playgroups, and computer labs". They are also very evident "in cyberspace" with "email, online discussion/chat". He notes that "students can make almost any site in the educational environment free from surveillance by colluding in constructing a culture of underlife behaviour" (ibid). Language learners bring expectations, meanings and relationships which are formed in the corridors, in their friendship groups, their families, the media and so on (Allwright and Bailey, 1991; Prabhu, 1992). They have perceptions of what teachers and classrooms are like even before having to deal with them directly. That these invisible sites have immense impact on the classroom reinforces the view that we cannot think of the classroom and language learning only in terms of the instrumentality of second language acquisition or visible task-based talk. We must instead think of them as 'coral gardens' of behaviour in which much of what is going on always remains out of sight of the teacher (Breen, 2001).

Revealing a hidden and unrecognised student life that is rich with creativity, criticality and self-direction, that goes against the established stereotypes that are rooted in cultural disbelief, has been the task of ethnographic studies. The focus of these studies is what goes on between students often out of sight of their teachers, outside the classroom and in moments within classrooms out of the teacher's line of sight. An example of this is where Taiwanese students in a British university study skills course are perceived by their teachers to lack autonomy because they do not perform the tasks they are given. The key to a very different interpretation however outside the classroom, where the students, who do not understand what their teachers want, practice autonomy in their own terms to get the information they need through their own devices, consulting Taiwanese undergraduate students, using the library and forming their own self-help groups (Holliday, 2005: 94, citing Chang). Another example is where secondary school teachers in Hong Kong think their students cannot carry out communicative activities because of their 'Confucian culture'. In sharp contrast to this, observation from the back of the class reveals extensive evidence of the students' communicative engagement with English, often in resistance to their teachers, for example working in groups in the classroom when the teacher asked them to perform tasks individually, and self- and group-study in the library (Holliday, 2005: 97-8, citing Tong).

Much has been written about how the processes of teaching and learning designed by teachers and educational institutions can hide and perhaps be in conflict with the social interaction between students and the expectations and identities they bring from the broader society. This conflict is expressed variously as: the aim of education to reproduce established social norms versus students' individual identities (Canagarajah, 2004: 119-20; see also Crookes, this volume); the lesson as designed by the teacher's versus the lesson as imagined by each student (Holliday, 1994: 142-59); the transaction of teaching and learning versus the social interaction that goes **[end of page 269]** on between students (Widdowson, 1987), and pedagogical images of classroom seating

arrangement versus those determined by how students wish to seat themselves according to friendship groups (Shamim, 1996).

The worlds of teachers

It would however be a gross mistake always to demonise teachers as representatives of the institutional domain that fails to understand the cultural contribution of their students. They are also participants in the educational process who need to be understood within the cosmopolitan model of appropriate methodology. They too have their freedoms limited by institutional and other structures. They can also be the victims of social, political and economic forces acting on the classroom from the wider society that they cannot control, as well as from the micro-politics, the favourability of their position in the timetable and so on from within the institution. They also bring into the classroom important identities from their own professional, reference and peer groups (Holliday, 1994: 17; van Lier, 1988: 8). Teachers also need to deal with the conflict between formal and informal orders, the impossibility of quality assurance régimes, the pressures to meet customer policy, or institutional statements of quality versus the realities of scarce resources and the real challenges of everyday professional life (Coleman, 1988; Swales, 1980). Teachers, therefore, like students, can also have secret and unrecognised lives in institutions. Rather than teachers, it is institutions and resources within environments of state and local politics, managerialism, neoliberalism, and hidden curricula related to other agendas that limit understanding (Holly, 1990).

There are many cases where teachers themselves struggle to find deeper educational meanings in the spaces between the pressures of examinations and prescribed syllabuses (e.g. Lin and Cheung, 2014), and where teachers in the most difficult circumstances collaborate out of school time to create highly innovative appropriate methodologies. Naidu et al. (1992) research how to interpret the diversity of their students in very large classes in India as a resource rather than a problem (see also Shamim and Kuchah, this volume). In Zhejiang Teacher's University in China, local teachers refuse to lecture and instead find ways to develop a bilingual and project-based communicative curriculum where teachers only teach what they are interested in and allow the students to develop their own syllabus as they move from teacher to teacher (Wu, 2005). In both these cases, the teachers go off-campus where they can develop ideas away from institutional pressures.

While the cosmopolitan appropriate methodology model applies to teachers everywhere, it provides particular encouragement for teachers who have felt marginalised within a so-called 'TESEP context' and whose attention may have been diverted away from the major resource of the cultural contribution of their students by the image of a better-resourced and unattainable BANA ideal.

Cosmopolitan cultural engagement

The possibility of a cosmopolitan appropriate methodology is underpinned by a social action approach to culture. Following the sociology of Max Weber (1964) this recognises that while different societies and communities do have particular features that make us, our cultural practices and our languages different, they do not necessarily prevent individuals from moving creatively beyond their boundaries. This can be seen in further ethnographic studies of student life.

The classic example is Canagarajah's description of how Sri Lankan secondary school students write their own agendas into the margins of their textbooks. They show a complex range **[end of page 270]** of what might be considered local and foreign cultural influences that express a cosmopolitan attitude towards English that travels across boundaries:

> Romance, sex, and cinema all show influences from international 'pop culture', and the lifestyle of Western entertainment media and youth groups; traditional cultural values and practices are based on Hindu religious roots; the modern Marxist-influenced political discourse is slanted towards nationalistic tendencies. (Canagarajah, 1999: 90)

The Web 2.0 phenomenon, the generation of internet-based material that students can interact with and write into, can help bring this cosmopolitan activity in hidden sites of learning into formal learning events. Lin and Cheung (2014: 141) report how students in a low-resourced secondary school in Hong Kong build on the multiple literacies they bring with them. They engage with "print, visual and multimodal" texts from "pop-music culture (e.g. songs, magazines, concerts, festivals, comics, interviews with pop stars, and so on)". They suggest that this is "especially important for young people as they go through the often-difficult adolescent stage", "searching for their identities", "constructing their self-image, and finding their self-worth" (Lin and Cheung, 2014: 140). They go on to comment that the cosmopolitan perspective which these students possess comes "with the globalisation of English popular cultural texts", "English-language pop cultural texts and genres" and "the lingua franca to interact with each other and with their cross-national and cross-cultural fans".

This crossing of cultural boundaries amongst language learners may be considered as a claiming of the world by the margins within a process of bottom-up globalisation. There has been much talk of a top-down globalisation as a fairly new phenomenon that has spread English across the world with the threat of destroying cultures; and there is certainly an element of this in the West defining cultural profiles across the world described above. It is also however argued that a cosmopolitan world existed across a broad network of local communities long before European colonialism divided the world with artificial boundaries, before European 19th century nationalism brought us the now traditional one-culture-one language model (Rajagopalan, 2012: 207). There is therefore nothing necessarily new about a bottom-up globalisation emerging from the Periphery that enriches rather than threatens its cultural communities in opposition to a Western

hegemony. An example of this is the changes to English brought about by young people across the world using it on the internet and through text messaging and the appropriation of rap and hip hop (Graddol, 2006: 42; Pennycook, 2003: 513). There have always been resilient local communities from which students can bring rich cultural and linguistic resources to the learning of new languages – and more recently to the learning of English. This is very evident in deeply multilingual societies like India. Here, people manage to communicate effectively across multiple language boundaries on a daily basis. They deal with different languages as though they are multiple genres (Amritavalli, 2012: 54; Rajagopalan, 2012: 209; see also Pennycook, this volume).

Cosmopolitan appropriate methodologists need therefore to consider the potential for students to engage creatively across cultural boundaries and their probable hunger for such engagement. Web 2.0 is an interesting phenomenon in this respect. While many students do not have the opportunity to engage with Web 2.0 because of economic circumstances, access and institutional policy, those students who do have access demonstrate potential that relates to all students. Web 2.0 therefore lays bare the creative learning potentials that students bring with them and shows teachers what they need to engage with and the role they need to fulfil. Norton (2014) shows us a similar process with language learners with digital cameras becoming journalists. While their **[end of page 271]** students have the multiple literacies for accessing and engaging with complex cosmopolitan material, they need their teachers to guide them in what to do with it (Warschauer, 2012).

Choice of what is authentic

Researching what takes place in hidden sites makes it clear that students will make their own choices about what they feel is authentic. This is very evident in interviews with secondary and primary school students across China about their attitudes to textbooks (Gong and Holliday, 2013). In rural areas, many of them complained about content about urban life, such as asking the way and planning a trip to Europe, which they do not find meaningful to their lives. Some of them felt that this content devalued their 'home culture'. This did not however mean that they were not interested in the world. The issue was not with strangeness but with interest. Indeed, many students showed interest in world affairs, music, international media and "topics on friendship, love and life skills". There was a deeply cosmopolitan desire to communicate with the world about identity (2013: 46-8). The texts that they complained about were chosen by the Chinese textbook writers because they were presumed authentic examples of 'native speaker' English and 'Western culture' (2013: 45). Cosmopolitan appropriate methodologists are trying to address what the students said by rewriting the national curriculum for teacher training in issues of language and culture. Thus, as Widdowson suggests, "it is probably better to consider authenticity not as a quality residing in instances of language but as a quality which is bestowed upon them, created by the response of the receiver" (1979: 165). In this sense it is to do with being meaningful to language learners.

However, language learners cannot be told what sort of English they should learn or what to use it for. University students in Kuwait, despite showing little motivation in the classroom, engage in sophisticated play with English among their friends and perceive it as a means to be themselves in a globalised world (Kamal, 2015). Mexican university students talk about how they stamp their identity on English by using it to discuss post-colonial politics (Clemente and Higgins, 2008), British secondary school students in multilingual London engaged in sophisticated play with each other's languages which looks as though they are misbehaving in the classroom (Rampton, 2011). At the same time, teachers and other ELT professionals do need to be able to make their own decisions, as language specialists, about what sort of English is to be taught, while taking heed of the cry for authenticity that students bring with them (Kuo, 2006).

Small culture engagement: case study 1

A further understanding of the nature of culture helps us understand better what students bring to the learning event and how we can respond to their expectations within a cosmopolitan appropriate methodology. There is a broad and significant domain of underlying universal cultural processes that enable all of us to read and engage creatively with culture and language wherever we find it. At the centre of this is our ability to engage with small cultures in such as family, school, classroom, and sports groups on a daily basis as we move through life. This is something we all share across nations and communities, and enables cultural travel. Just as young people find ways to make sense of and be themselves when they visit their friends' families, they can also make huge sense of others' cultural realities without losing their identities. They can also expand their identities by finding ways to innovate within them (Holliday, 2013: 19-20).

An example of this small culture engagement can be seen in the study of Iranian students doing a six-month technical English course at Lancaster University in 1980 (Holliday, 1994: 144-6; 2005: 102). Half way through the course they began to refuse to do the communicative tasks set by the teacher, and appeared to be talking about other things and just misbehaving. **[end of page 272]** However, when the researcher looked into what the students were saying, it was discovered that they were complaining that the tasks were not meaningful and were not communicative enough. They wanted to work with the material in their own way; and when the teacher agreed, the students had more opportunity to communicate meaningfully with texts and the teacher; and, moreover, their test results soared. To work out this strategy for change, they had engaged with the small culture of the classroom. They had worked out how it operated, how to apply their intelligence to it and how to preserve their identities within its structures. However, when we engage with small cultures we do not always get what we want. We have to negotiate and it does not always work because there will be conservative forces acting against us. We all have the potential for cultural travel and innovation; but sometimes existing power structures work against us. The Iranian students had got ahead of their teachers by working out from watching them what 'communicative' was and then demanding even more. When their demands were initially unrecognised by

their teacher, they went into the hidden site of apparent misbehaviour rather like many of the students referred to earlier in this chapter.

Statements about culture

What acted against finding an appropriate methodology for the Iranian students were the stereotypes the teachers possessed about where they came from. When they first arrived the students complained that all they wanted to do was learn grammar in formal lectures because of their 'national culture'. This 'our context' statement was taken literally at the time by the teachers, and this influenced how the students were perceived for the remaining three months until the incident above took place. If the teachers had simply accepted at face value the Iranian students' statement that their culture only allowing the lecturing of grammar, and a researcher had not looked more deeply into what was going on, their immense linguistic and cultural abilities would never have been recognised.

The social action approach tries to work with such statements about culture in a different way. They are understood as conscious or unconscious strategic projections of how one wants to be seen by others, very often in response to how one is being treated. Grimshaw's (2010) study of how Chinese students in British universities self-stereotype to gain personal space and social capital in the face of cultural disbelief on the part of British students and teachers, is useful here, and links to considerable social research on how marginalised, Periphery communities often appear to buy into the imagery imposed upon them to maintain their own security. Statements about culture therefore need to be taken as cultural products rather than as descriptions of culture. They are produced by the culture but do not define it.

It would be naïve to imagine that a cosmopolitan appropriate methodology will simply do away with essentialist descriptions of TESEP cultures. These descriptions must be taken seriously as being meaningful to the people who make them; and cosmopolitan appropriate methodologists need to get to the bottom of why these statements are made and what therefore is meaningful to the people involved. There are many iconic statements in the ELT profession that are let go as easy answers. An example is the superior-inferior framing of the native-non-native speaker issue. Whether or not teachers are constructed as 'native' or 'non-native', it is the politics behind this construction that becomes key data in devising an educational methodology to resolve it – as it would be if there was discrimination against any other parties in the setting.

Making connections across settings: case study 2

Moving away from a narrowly context-driven BANA-TESEP approach recognises the need to look more widely in determining a cosmopolitan appropriate methodology. When student [end of page 273] teachers from a university in Hong Kong came to Britain for a language immersion programme, they immediately seemed to conform to the common East-Asian stereotype by not speaking in the classroom. It would have been easy to take

this as indicative of the context they came from. Instead, ethnographic research was carried out to get to the bottom of what was really going on (Holliday, 2005: 88-107). This research primarily involved observing their behaviour during all aspects of the course – in class, during drama classes, on campus, in staff-student evaluation sessions, in their home room where they worked on projects, when visiting schools to which they were attached as assistant teachers, and group presentations. This research produced the initial finding that they were only quiet in the classroom when the tutor was present. Everywhere else, they were keen to interact with everyone they met and were, moreover, sharply observant to the extent that the review they presented at a primary school at the end of their programme was a highly sophisticated satire of British society.

Understanding that the stereotype was not valid was not, however, sufficient to unlock the reason for the silence in the classroom and where a more appropriate methodology may lie. A number of critical incidents within the research project helped, sometimes beyond the immediate environment of the course. These included: seeing the same students in a phonology lecture in their university in Hong Kong; comparing this with a sociology lecture in a British university; being surprised that the students bought postcards about expressionist art while visiting a gallery in London; the students taking over the classroom to get on with project work when their teacher left to get something; them not noticing him when he visited them in their home room because they were getting on with their projects; seeing evidence of describing the students as though they were children in the researcher's ethnographic descriptions; and a student telling the researcher that he was not prepared to talk in class because he felt too much under scrutiny. Two other research projects also contributed to these findings. Video sequences of Japanese secondary school students showed them supporting each other with bilingual 'private talk' with other students, under the surface of the formal part of lesson, while the teacher was talking, but not acknowledge by him (Holliday, 2005: 90-1). Japanese students in a British language class were talkative outside the classroom and when the teacher was out of the class, but 'froze' and went silent when the teacher was there (Holliday, 2005: 90, citing Hayagoshi).

Putting all this together, it was possible to say that the students were *uncharacteristically* silent in the classroom because there was insufficient personal space in the high-scrutiny U-shape seminar room for them to feel comfortable enough to speak. It was intimidating that every single word they said was being scrutinised. This was in contrast to the space that was available in all the other activities they were engaged in during the programme, and to the space available in their university lectures in Hong Kong. This anxiety might have been exacerbated by their adult identity as university students having been overshadowed by being forced into the more childlike image of language learners, and by their knowledge of science, art, social science and so on not having been appreciated. The outcomes of the research enabled a significant change in the methodology for teaching them. 'Meetings', with chairs placed close together at one end of the room, replaced 'lessons' in the traditional U-shape. The students were never silent again.

Conclusion: elusive meanings

To conclude, cosmopolitan appropriate methodologists need to look widely and deeply at whatever it takes to unlock how to engage with the existing communicative and cultural experience of their students. This search must not, however, be stylised within prescribed notions of 'context', especially where they correspond with national cultural profiling and any notion of **[end of page 274]** cultural deficiency. Cosmopolitan appropriate methodology research needs to be sufficiently open-ended, creative and interpretive to connect wide-ranging factors in such a way that unexpected meanings can emerge. Always starting from the assumption that students are intelligent and capable, it is necessary to address and interrogate attitudes, prejudices, power structures, histories, preoccupations, destructive stereotypes, and theories about culture and values. The social action approach tells us that there is nothing in the cultural domain which is not negotiable, and that boundaries can more often be crossed than not, as long as opportunities are there. Much of the original focus of appropriate methodology is still relevant here. This involves appreciating how the classroom is part of a wider social world, through which there is the development of a sociological imagination (Mills, 1970) – the ability to locate oneself and one's actions critically within a wider community or world scenario.

Discussion questions

- Remember examples of when you made strong statements about your ELT context. What did you exaggerate and why?
- Take the two sections in the chapter about the Iranian and the Hong Kong students. Either (a) read the original references, or (b) use your own experience to imagine the detail. Draw a diagram that represents the process of arriving at an appropriate methodology for these scenarios.
- Consider anything you have recently read about cultural context. In want sense was any part of this essentialist? On what basis do you make this judgement?
- Is it really the case that differentiating TESEP and BANA leads to the objectification of TESEP?

Related topics

Communicative language teaching in theory and practice; ELT materials: claims, critiques and controversies; Language and culture in ELT; Native speakers, English and ELT: changing perspectives; Politics, power relationships and ELT; Teaching large classes in difficult circumstances.

Further reading

Breen, M. P. (2001) 'The social context of language learning – a neglected situation?', in C.N. Candlin and N. Mercer (eds) *English language teaching in its social context*. London: Routledge: 122-44. [Originally published in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 7/02: 135-58, 1985.] (This seminal paper explores how most of the culture of the classroom, and how students apply their existing cultural competence to language learning, remains hidden beneath the surface.)

Breen, M. P. and Candlin, C. N. (1980) 'The essentials of a communicative curriculum in language teaching'. *Applied Linguistics*, I/2: 89-112. (This early presentation of a communicative approach sets out the principles for using the communicative experience that students bring to the classroom as a major resource. It presents a broad educational approach that can be applied to any cultural setting.)

Holliday, A. R. (2005) *The struggle to teach English as an international language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (This book revisits appropriate methodology within the context of the hidden politics of native-speakerism. It deals with the roots of the essentialist cultural profiling that is common in ELT professionalism, and suggests non-essentialist solutions.)

Widdowson, H. G. (1987) 'The roles of teacher and learner'. *ELT journal*, 41/2: 83-88.(This early seminal paper sets out the two key elements of the language classroom – the *transaction* of teaching and learning, and the *interaction* between the students – to show us that teachers can only ever have minute influence on what is going on between their students in the classroom) **[end of page 275]**

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