

The place of Benesch's critical English for academic purposes in the current practice of academic language and learning

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This paper discusses the central tenets of the theory of critical English for academic purposes (CEAP), with a focus on the work of Sarah Benesch. Her 2001 book, *Critical English for Academic Purposes: Theory, Politics and Practice*, attempted to highlight the compliant nature of EAP as an academic field, arguing against the view that its sole function is the enablement of student success in other disciplines. While Benesch accepts that assisting students in this way is important, she argues that EAP should also empower them to challenge and even change the education they receive. In addition to outlining and evaluating the theory (including dissenting views on it), this paper considers the potential for applying it in the Australian higher education context and gauges its impact to date by analysing three documents: a federal education department directive for EAP instruction, a peak EAP organisation's position statement, and a report on international student political activism in the national Australian press.

Key words: critical pedagogy, critical English for academic purposes, EAP, academic language and learning, international students, higher education, Sarah Benesch

1. Introduction

Program coordinators, instructors, and curriculum designers can feel a sense of unease when they encounter the literature of critical pedagogy. This is because it calls on them to consider afresh the foundational principles of their teaching practice. As Joe Kincheloe (2008) explains, "proponents of critical pedagogy understand that every dimension of schooling and every form of educational practice are politically contested spaces" (p. 2). All teaching, he argues, is shaped by "cultural, race, class, and gender forces" and "a central aspect of democratic education involves addressing these dynamics as they systematically manifest themselves" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 2). Thus, critical pedagogy entails a radical reassessment of everything one does as an educator, and why one is doing it.

EAP practitioners who do not adopt the critical approach have tended to be disparaged as pragmatists. In particular, Pennycook (1997) argued that the interdisciplinary service role of EAP has resulted in it being characterised by a "discourse of pragmatism" (p. 254) that allows EAP instructors and researchers to focus more on contextually sensitive, technical, everyday concerns of students' academic study. Adopting terms from Cherryholmes (1988), Pennycook (1997) describes this as "vulgar pragmatism" (p. 256). He suggests that an alternative is a form of "critical pragmatism" in which the realities of the academic system are addressed through EAP study, but are critiqued so that the values, norms and hierarchies that underlie the system become clear to students. In turn, critiques of this critique, as it were, have been forthcoming

from scholars such as Allison (1996) and Santos (2001) who defend the appropriateness of context-sensitive, accommodationist approaches.

As the coordinator of a large-scale credit-bearing university EAP program in Australia, I admit to feelings of unease in the past that I had not read, in any serious depth, a great deal of the critical pedagogy literature, let alone the critiques of it. Was I letting my students down, I questioned? I therefore chose to focus on Benesch for this paper because her book, *Critical English for Academic Purposes: Theory, Politics and Practice* (Benesch, 2001), is recognised as a canonical text in this area, in combination with several widely cited academic articles (particularly Benesch, 1993, 1996). Her status as a leading figure is confirmed by her guest editorship of the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* special edition on critical EAP (CEAP) (Benesch, 2009) and her authorship of *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* entry on CEAP (Benesch, 2012).

This paper is effectively one EAP professional's response to a reading of her 2001 book and associated articles. I declare that my authorial stance is not that of the expert. Rather, I belong to the audience with which Benesch, and all CEAP theorists, most need to connect: the EAP teacher/manager who has not formed a considered, knowledgeable view on CEAP but who is open to what it has to offer, with a view to possible implementation. I thereby enact the reflexive stance of the teacher-theorist that is itself a key goal of critical pedagogy:

Teachers are seen as researchers and knowledge workers who reflect on their professional needs and current understandings. [...] [T]hey explore and attempt to interpret the learning processes that take place in their classrooms. (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 18)

In this paper I present three key questions that reading Benesch provoked in me, as an EAP educator. I also consider the place of CEAP in the current Australian higher education context, by analysing three documents: a federal Education department EAP policy guideline; an EAP peak body position statement; and a national media report on political activism by international students.

2. Critical EAP

The Joe Kincheloe quotes above constitute a definition of sorts of critical pedagogy. Benesch (2012, p. 1) has provided a definition of its sub-type, critical EAP:

Critical EAP, [...] while retaining the aim of helping students navigate academic discourses and disciplines, challenges the notion of academic conventions as necessarily reasonable and non-negotiable. Instead, CEAP sees students as active agents, rather than novices or subordinates, who can be encouraged to question unreasonable requirements and collaborate with their instructors in developing appropriate curricula.

It can be seen that this definition harmonises with Pennycook's critical pragmatic approach to EAP. It accepts that students need assistance in gaining access to the academy, but it assumes that students and teachers ought to act as change agents within the system. My engagement with this approach raised three key points for reflection:

1. Should I be better informed about the nature of the industry I work in?
2. Should I be more aware of the ideological biases of my teaching?
3. Should the curricula I design and implement have a more critical edge?

I now consider each point in turn.

2.1. Should I be better informed about the nature of the industry I work in?

This question was brought into sharp focus as a result of reading *Critical English for Academic Purposes*, one chapter of which analyses EAP's political and economic origins. EAP's genesis is traced to the rise of Western industrial interests in non-English speaking countries, where corporate employers viewed English for specific purposes (ESP) training as a necessity for locally hired employees. Benesch's (2001) key argument is that these beginnings, rooted as they

are in the economic and geopolitical history of the twentieth century, are rarely questioned or considered problematic. It is taken as entirely natural by EAP educators and students that modern science and technology developed within the so-called “Western” tradition and that the need for English language instruction inevitably grew as a result. For example, she makes reference to Swales’ (1977) discussion of the growth of ESP in the Middle East and attributes to him the view that “it was an unquestionably good service for all” (Benesch, 2001, p. 26).

Benesch argues that such accounts fail to mention the self-interested motives of governments, corporations, and organisations in seeing that English predominated in order to entrench their political/colonial power base, control of resources and economic might. This view aligns with the doctrine of “linguistic imperialism” propounded by Phillipson (1992), to whom Benesch pays substantial homage in the text.

One may ask why it matters how, or from where, ESP/EAP was initially developed. Are the operations of US or British corporations in the 1970s of any relevance to EAP instructors or students today? Benesch’s response to that position is the following:

[W]ithout that understanding, those working in it will be operating under naive assumptions about the English language (e.g., it is neutral), English language teaching (e.g., it grew inevitably because of increased demand by learners), and learning (e.g., students want English unambivalently). A critical approach to EAP avoids these uncomplicated and ahistorical assumptions and allows for a more nuanced and dynamic relationship between target situations and students’ purposes, desires, and aspirations. (Benesch, 2001, p. 35)

Later in the book, Benesch ascribes a position to some EAP practitioners that exceeds the ignorant or naïve stance illustrated in the quote above, and is closer to wilful neglect. This is a position of so-called “political quietism” (Benesch, 2001, p. 41), a term that implies a degree of collusion in preserving the status quo by failing to speak up about the true nature of questionable practices in the EAP industry. Such issues include the way higher education is funded, the design of curricula, the maintenance of hierarchical structures, the treatment of teachers and the demands placed on students. Practitioners could also have more to say about the “P” in EAP: i.e. what are the purposes of academic English teaching? Do they include, for example, the maintenance of US/UK-centric academic norms, and the deferential provision of assistance to higher-order content courses? Thus, it is possible that EAP practitioners remain silent on issues that not only negatively impact on their students, but perpetuate oppressive conditions in their own professional lives.

All of the above observations remain as pertinent now as they were in 2001. Space does not allow a detailed consideration of each of them, but one overriding point is that higher education in the West (particularly Australia) is now, more than ever, viewed as an “industry” in the same way that, say, mining, retail, and tourism are. Its success is measured by the creation and accumulation of financial as much as intellectual capital (Chun, 2009; Marginson & Considine, 2000). International students are the lifeblood of EAP courses and are considered a prized human commodity that can underwrite a university’s bottom line. But despite their ‘value’, Marginson, Nyland, Sawir and Forbes-Mewett (2010) suggest that students in the Australian context have been short-changed:

Consistent with the commercial paradigm and systems of quality assurance, the Australian industry is locked into service improvement and customer satisfaction, not product (teaching and learning) improvement. [...] Because every possible dollar is siphoned out of international education, the students fail to secure full value and academic innovations are a luxury. [...] The drive to minimise costs so as to maximise surplus pushes international education into a one size fits all mould that reduces or eliminates the potential for depth, nuancing, customised programs, learning strategies and pastoral care. (pp. 50-51)

Therefore, an important question for today's EAP educators is whether to draw students' attention to the commercial nature of higher education as part of an informed, critical curriculum. Should we demonstrate to students how important they are to the maintenance of the system, and what this entails for their rights? Is this a reasonable expectation of EAP instructors who may have legitimate fears about job security? Although I feel that I should be better informed about the nature of the industry I work in, I am conflicted about how to act upon that knowledge (more on this in section 2.3).

2.2. Should I be more aware of the ideological biases of my teaching?

Another fundamental tenet of Benesch's work (and of critical pedagogy in general) is the conviction that all teaching is riven with ideology. Every curriculum, syllabus, and lesson manifests a belief system. Therefore it is better to make the ideological element visible to students, to the extent that an awareness of ideology in learning becomes a key objective of the learning process itself. In Benesch's approach, students are empowered to critique the forms and systems of learning to which they are subjected. The alternative, she suggests, is to perpetuate a phoney neutrality that not only dulls students' critical faculties, but maintains a status quo which invariably is to their disadvantage.

In the main, the ever-presence of ideology in all learning and teaching processes is acknowledged and accepted. The kernel of debate is in the extent to which teachers make it explicit. Santos (2001) points out that we can never be truly neutral in any pedagogical decision we take, but there can be degrees of neutrality. CEAP presents itself as an advance on traditional teaching by 'busting' the myth of neutrality and forthrightly demonstrating to students where and how ideology is at the centre of all education. The counter-argument is that when ideological positions are made explicit in the classroom, the result can be overt activism. An example would be instructing a cohort of EAP chemical engineers that US corporations have manipulated Middle Eastern geopolitics to maximise oil returns. Santos (2001) argues that the Western liberal tradition is happily and deliberately based on a pretence of neutrality – that is, educators try to be neutral, even in the knowledge that complete neutrality is impossible. In this way, classrooms avoid becoming the plaything of proselytisers promoting one-sided views under the pretext of honest disclosure.

Many CEAP theorists themselves promote the type of nuanced, though ultimately feigned, neutrality that Santos urges. For example, Shin-ying Huang (2012), a critical pedagogue, describes the implementation of an EFL critical literacy writing program in this way:

I took care not to impose my own views of the research themes on the students. It was they rather than I who were conducting the research. In other words, although I worked with the students to identify socially significant questions regarding their topics of interest, I respected whatever findings and conclusions they reached. (p. 290)

Huang is careful to make the claim that a position of impartiality with respect to course themes is possible on the part of the instructor. Similarly, Pessoa and Freitas (2012) describe a Brazilian program for teaching English through critical socio-political issues, and note that several students expressed "dominant views about the topics" (p. 773) – i.e. views that did not gel with the instructors' left-wing perspectives on social justice. The authors, who are proponents of critical pedagogy, advise that "when teachers present counter-discourses by means of an explanation or an academic text, they have to be careful not to impose these on the students" (Pessoa & Freitas, 2012, p. 773). Thus, Pessoa and Freitas seem to believe that teachers and students can co-construct a respectful agree-to-disagree third space even when students' views are overlaid by their instructors' ideological conjectures. A flaw in these proposals is that they underplay the power and influence of teachers over students (as professed by critical pedagogy itself), and the unlikelihood that counter-discourses will be forthcoming from instructors when students' views *do* gel with their own.

There is no doubt that becoming more aware of the ideological biases of one's teaching is a good thing. It is hard to conceive of a reason why it would not be, and one finds few if any

proponents of this view in the literature. The debate concerns how we as educators manage ideology in concert with our students.

2.3. Should the curriculum I design and implement have a more critical edge?

For any theory of EAP, a key question is whether it works in practice. Morgan (2009, p. 89) rightly points out that many of “the key texts that promote critical pedagogies” are “inaccessible and over-theorized”, an unfortunate irony given that a goal of critical pedagogy is to end the exclusionary practices of academic elites. CEAP has also been chastised for failing “to offer pedagogical alternatives” or “readily implementable classroom episodes” (Harwood & Hadley, 2004, p. 365). On these matters, Benesch’s work is highly praiseworthy, not only for the accessibility of its prose but also for maintaining as much focus on practice as on theory. Appropriately, her 2001 book is divided into two parts, “theory and politics” and “practice”, with the practice section longer than the theory one (five chapters to four). Her work speaks to practising teachers and suggests roadmaps for enacting classroom change.

In her *TESOL Quarterly* article Benesch (1996) describes a paired ESL/psychology course as a model for CEAP in practice. Three types of learning activities are described, categories that provide a framework for discussion of critical curriculum development more generally. The first type is relatively uncritical, and involves helping students to better manage the requirements of their content courses. Examples are reviewing lecture notes, anticipating test questions and presenting on textbook topics. The second activity type is termed “challenging” (Benesch, 1996, p. 733) as it aims to overturn the positioning of students as passive receivers of knowledge. Examples are getting students to generate questions for content lecturers and having lecturers visit EAP classes to interact with students in informal settings. The final type involves activities that override the traditional role of EAP as a meek support act to the disciplines and aims “to create possibilities for social awareness and action” (Benesch, 1996, p. 735). One such activity involves the insertion of alternative curriculum content to address perceived blind spots and/or highlight hegemonic biases in mainstream disciplinary offerings. For example, Benesch’s students researched and wrote assignments about anorexia in order to raise the profile of women’s issues in their male-dominated psychology program. She also apprenticed students into political activism by having them compose letters of protest to the New York state government against higher education funding cuts.

There is little controversy around the first two activity types. The first is by definition uncritical and therefore uncontentious. It is an expectation of most EAP courses that students are aided in understanding their associated content courses. The second type, in which students formulate ways of questioning the content of these courses and directly communicating with those who convene them, still falls broadly within the conventional norms of Western academic culture, in which active learners are encouraged and silent learners are often penalised through low participation grades and the like (Brick, 2011; Nakane, 2006).

However, the third category of pedagogical recommendations has caused some critics to take exception. In a discussion of Benesch’s anorexia research project, Santos (2001) argues that its design is overly prescriptive and (ironically) retrograde in that it dictates student choice rather than offering it:

Her requirement of a specific topic assignment was a throwback to a time in academia when professors typically set writing topics because they wanted uniformity and believed they knew best what students should write on. (p. 186)

As we saw in the previous section [the discussion of Huang (2012) and Pessoa & Freitas (2012)], the issue of student choice is still a delicate one among advocates of critical pedagogy. For example, although Huang (2012) is of the view that instructors should not pass judgement on students’ choice of themes, she still argues that “it would be extremely unrealistic to expect novice critical writers to identify globally relevant topics” (p. 296). A confusion at the heart of critical pedagogy is evident in Huang’s use of the word “novice”, in that it contradicts Benesch’s (2012) definitive statement quoted earlier in this paper that “CEAP sees students as active agents, rather than novices or subordinates” (p. 1). Although these are isolated examples,

they exemplify a common contradiction in the literature: at times the students are characterised as novices who need help and at other times traditional teaching is condemned for treating them in just such a patronising manner.

Questions around the positioning of the students have also formed part of the attack on Benesch's advocacy of teacher-inspired activism. It will be remembered that Benesch had her students write protest letters as a way of learning about taking action for social change. For Santos (2001), this is a troubling activity because all teachers naturally assume that their own ideological convictions are the right ones. However, this does not give them the right to engage the students in the promotion of those convictions, no matter how admirable and noble one may believe those convictions to be. An example that I have discussed elsewhere (Fenton-Smith, 2013) is the debate between Peaty (2004, 2005) and Guest (2005), the former an advocate of global issues in language teaching, the latter a critic:

Peaty's advocacy...manifests all the worst of the missionary mentality. Here we have a scenario in which the masses (students) have been duped by an unfair, devious power (government and its minions in the monolithic mass-media) that is fundamentally "wrong". However, the teacher – the enlightened one – knows the truth. He therefore feels it is his bounden duty – he is, after all, an *educator* – to impart these truths to his captive audience in order to lift the veil of deceit from their eyes and "save" them. (Guest, 2005, p. 12).

Although critical pedagogy's vision of the emancipated student may be admirable, it may also be at odds with the wishes of some of the students themselves. If this is so, then either the teacher knows best and the students are misguided, or the teacher is living out a heroic fantasy at the students' expense.

Despite some of the objections to CEAP, it is possible to sharpen the critical edge of the curriculum without, as it were, resorting to vulgar activism. Controversial social topics can be focussed on as long as instructors maintain a sufficient degree of feigned neutrality to allow and respect student voices, and as long as instructors are prepared to canvass 'counter-discourses' that actually run counter to their own convictions, not just counter to their notion of hegemonic discourses. Furthermore, mainstream discipline lecturers *can* be challenged and typically expect to be, although students need to know that lecturers have varying expectations.

On the other hand some areas of CEAP-style curriculum innovation would be more contentious now than they were 10-20 years go. Morgan (2009, pp. 89-90) has raised the issue of "the professional risks and responsibilities" that EAP instructors "should reasonably assume" in implementing a CEAP curriculum. Returning to the ideas of section 2.1, EAP activities that critique the commercial nature of higher education fall into this category. It would, for example, be a brave EAP instructor that used this article from Melbourne's *The Age* newspaper as a core reading in an EAP program: "Students from abroad treated like cash cows" (Craig, 2010).

3. Critical EAP and current Australian practice

How influential is CEAP on the current practice of academic language and learning in Australia? It is difficult to accurately gauge the impact of a pedagogical theory on practising educators because a lot of what is practised goes unreported in academic journals. Nevertheless, much can be learned from an analysis of key documents published by the peak bodies that regulate, represent and/or report on the sector. By doing so, we can gain an insight into the degree of purchase that a theory has on current activity. To that end, the following sub-sections each consider CEAP through a different lens. The first is a governmental perspective: an analysis of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)'s (2009) report, *Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students in Australian Universities*. The second provides an organisational perspective: an analysis of the Association for Academic Language and Learning's official *Position Statement*. The final perspective comes from the national media: an analysis of a report on international student activism published in the national broadsheet *The Australian*.

3.1. Government-endorsed Good Practice Principles

Published in 2009 at the behest of federal education authorities, the *Good Practice Principles* report had the dual purpose of (1) describing “what is known about current good practice” in EAP for international students at Australian universities, and (2) assisting “universities and other institutions in reviewing and improving their own activities” (DEEWR, 2009, Document 1, p. 2). In its summation of current good practice, the report makes no mention of activities that have a CEAP orientation. Although it does commend some universities for implementing “actions to increase understanding of diversity and cross-cultural teaching and awareness” (DEEWR, 2009, Document 2, p. 12), this statement refers more to fostering cultural integration among international students than it does to critical pedagogy. Similarly, in the report’s list of gaps in current good practice, it is not stated that CEAP, or broadly critical approaches, are largely absent from university programs. Thus, CEAP is not recognised as either a current practice worthy of note or as a desired strategy to be implemented.

What about the ten good practice principles themselves? Interestingly, CEAP does not feature in those either. Only principle #8 comes close to Benesch’s ideas: “International students are supported from the outset to adapt to their academic, sociocultural and linguistic environments” (DEEWR, 2009, Document 1, p. 3). If, at a stretch, we take “adapt” to mean “understand and critically evaluate”, the principle could align with some of Benesch’s pedagogical recommendations mentioned earlier in this paper. However, one would more likely interpret principle #8 as a directive to operationalise the “vulgar pragmatist” approach to EAP, in that it appears to recommend that instructors assimilate international students into the academic, sociocultural and linguistic norms of the host nation. This is arguably antithetical to CEAP, which eschews the accommodationist aping of discipline-imposed standards in favour of reappraising why and how those standards have been imposed.

The absence of CEAP principles from the government report does not mean that CEAP lacks relevance in the current learning and teaching context. On the contrary, the point of critical pedagogy is to look askance at the mainstream, to provide critical alternatives to it, and to point out those aspects that are disadvantageous to the least powerful (in this case, international students). It would be a surprise if directives from the centralised education bureau advocated a CEAP approach, since doing so could open the door to difficult questions about their own role and that of tertiary institutions in growing the international education market.

3.2. EAP peak body’s Position Statement

The Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL) is the peak “organisational body for the growing community of professionals around Australia who work with university students to enhance their learning and academic English” (AALL, 2012, para 1). The predominant discourse of AALL’s *Position Statement* (AALL, 2010) is one of access, not critique. It is taken for granted in the document that Australian higher education is a desirable commodity and it is assumed that the purpose of EAP educators is to spread the benefits of such an education to more people.

Two “core objectives” of its membership are to provide “access to the highest quality of learning and teaching experiences” and develop “disciplinary academic and professional language and learning strategies and attributes in all higher education students” (AALL, 2010, p. 2). Thus, academic language specialists aid students in gaining entry into the academy, but do not seek to effect significant change in the academy itself. In this aspect, the statement is indicative of the political detachment that Benesch views as characteristic of traditional EAP. However, it is also stated that EAP professionals “promote quality, diversity, internationalisation and flexibility in language and learning development” (AALL, 2010, p. 3), an objective that is perhaps broad enough to include critical practices. Moreover, there is some suggestion at various points in the document that higher education would be improved if only the wider academic community paid more attention to the publication and conference output of academic language and learning educators, which to some extent supports Benesch’s contention that EAP could have a transformative influence on mainstream academia if it was less marginalised.

The document also states that a further objective of EAP educators is to “identify and address students’ academic language and learning needs” (AALL, 2010, p. 2). Benesch (2001) has strong views on the place of needs analysis in EAP, arguing that it should be reformed so that it does not just account for what students know/don’t know and what they can do/can’t do with respect to target situations (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) but should also consider disjunctures between external requirements and students’ desires, and consider whose interests are served by the needs analysis process. Moreover, she contends that needs analysis ought to be complemented with an analysis of students’ rights. Specifically, such an analysis would account for the “unfavourable social, institutional, and classroom conditions” (Benesch, 2001, p. 108) that students may face. This broader conceptualisation of needs analysis is not observable in the *AALL Position Statement* and nowhere are students’ rights mentioned. The term “needs” – associated with students – is mentioned four times. This suggests that Benesch is correct in claiming that needs analysis is the dominant paradigm for the articulation of the student perspective, but it also indicates that her call for a switch to rights analysis has gone largely unheeded, at least in the Australian context.

As a follow-up to the above discussion, I analysed the titles, abstracts and keywords contained in the AALL delegates’ handbook for the organisation’s 2013 national conference (AALL, 2013). In over one hundred presentations, not one made reference to critical pedagogy, CEAP, or Benesch, confirming that current interest is weak.

3.3. International student activism in the national media

Finally, I present a case study of political activism by international students in Australia that was reported in *The Australian* newspaper’s Higher Education supplement (Lane, 2012, p. 19). The report is worth examining because it illustrates the kinds of reactions that overseas students can expect when they engage in activities that may be antithetical to both the mainstream host culture and to left-leaning critical pedagogues. The case study allows educators to gauge where they draw the line (if at all) for (un)acceptable political activism by international students. It is one thing to propose classroom political activities in applied linguistics journals, but another to negotiate with student militancy in the real world.

Titled “Former diplomat warns of Beijing role in Chinese student activism”, the report opens with the statement that “Large numbers of Chinese students in Australia represent a ‘two-edged sword’ because of China’s willingness to mobilise them for political purposes at odds with our democratic freedoms”, a view attributed to Australia’s first ambassador to China, Dr Stephen Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald reportedly claimed by example that “thousands” of Chinese students in Australia had been inspired by the government in Beijing to wage counter-protests against demonstrations over Tibet during the Olympic torch relay through Canberra in 2008.

The article offers two contrasting interpretations of the Chinese students’ actions. The first is that the Chinese government mobilised students to “disrupt and interdict, in Australia, the exercise of an Australian democratic right to peaceful protest” (quoting Fitzgerald). The second is that international students from China “are young, bright and educated enough to voluntarily find a way to have their voice heard by the world” (quoting Christiania Liang, a member of the Australia-China Youth Dialogue and graduate of the Shanghai International Studies University). The conflicting representations echo the two views of students discussed in section 2.3 of this paper: on the one hand, they are the victims of manipulation by higher powers; on the other hand, they are strong, agentive, and can think for themselves.

The protest event and the differing perspectives on it give pause for thought about political activism amongst international students. Do these students have the right to collective protest over political issues while studying in Australia? Advocates of the CEAP approach would presumably answer yes. Such students would appear to exhibit the very behaviour that critical pedagogues hope to foster – that is, serious engagement with issues of global and political importance. Their actions are reminiscent of Benesch’s students who wrote letters of protest to New York legislators, with the exception that the Australian cohort’s actions were not directed by a university instructor.

However, Ambassador Fitzgerald's reservations suggest that the students' actions are at odds with the free-thinking values promoted by critical pedagogues. This begs the question: are objections to political protests by international students only raised when the protest issue runs counter to the prevailing ideology of the local university culture? For example, would it be less objectionable if Chinese students in Australia protested about inaction on climate change instead of objecting to Tibetan independence? As Morgan (2009, p. 90) observes, all CEAP practitioners have to consider "which forms of systemic inequality become the subject matter of critical inquiry" and ask themselves, "How will we respond to students who reject our 'truths'?"

4. Conclusion

I began by framing this paper not as an expert's view but as the reflexive think-aloud of an academic language instructor encountering CEAP for the first time. My conclusion is that the process of engaging with CEAP theory is well worth it, and recommended for all EAP educators. This is not to advocate that the principles and practices of CEAP (which are not monolithic in any case) be implemented whatever the context. It is plainly impossible to do so given the multitude and variety of constraints that EAP educators operate under. Even Pennycook (1997) offers EAP a choice between two types of pragmatism, vulgar and critical, not between pragmatism and revolution. The valuable contribution of CEAP is that it informs one's pragmatic choices, and at least provides the fuel to fight for a less accommodationist, more critical curriculum, even if it is never perfectly realised. As Allison (1996) puts it, pragmatism need not signal the death of principle, rather it "seeks to relate understanding to action so that each is informed by the other" (p. 87).

The answer to all three of the questions that I posed in section 2 is "yes". I should be more aware of EAP's origins and of the commercial and politico-social realities of the present-day higher education sector. I should think about the part that my students play in this – especially fee-paying international students – and whether they are willing consumers or a manipulated commodity (or, somehow, both). I should also question my own role in maintaining and co-constructing the system, particularly through my design of courses. I should reflect on the ideological underpinnings of my teaching and the extent to which I do or do not make ideology an explicit focus. When I look afresh at my curriculum I ought to assess if it is sufficiently critical, in the knowledge that I now have the tools to conduct this analysis. Utilising Benesch's (1996) typology of critical activities, I can evaluate which activities assist students with the requirements of their discipline program, which ones challenge it, and which ones instigate social action beyond the program. As the policy analyses in section 3 show, I also have a valuable additional lens through which to view the EAP world beyond my institutional borders. Finally, I also have the option of changing nothing. I may well concur with Santos (2001) that higher education is by definition elitist and that we, as university educators, are party to this whether we like it or not by accepting employment in it. But at least I do so knowingly.

Working on this paper has therefore presented me with a curious conundrum. In one sense, my conclusion is that Benesch's CEAP approach has little discernible influence over the current practice of academic language and learning in my surrounding context. On the other hand, reading Benesch has invigorated the way I see my current practice and convinced me that CEAP deserves greater attention from current EAP practitioners.

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