Addressing Religious Issues and Power in ELT Classrooms: Voices from English Teachers in Indonesia

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Abstract
Drawing on insights from the ELT literature on values, power (relations), and dialogues on faith, this article will explore how explore how EFL teachers reflected on their attempts to communicate their religious views to students. Data was acquired from three Christian English teachers. One was from the USA and the other two were Indonesian nationals. They participated in a larger case study project in an undergraduate English Language Teacher Education program at a university in Indonesia. In interviews teachers demonstrated the enactment of interfaith dialogues, critical thinking, respect, and religious reflexivity. This exploratory study concludes that religious values can be incorporated into ELT in a critical and reflexive manner, with a heightened awareness of religiously associated power relations, particularly between teachers and students.

Key words: critical thinking, interfaith dialogues, power (relations), religious reflexivity, values

Introduction

The incorporation of spirituality into foreign language education has been endorsed by scholars (e.g., Baurain, 2007 [in terms of becoming Christ's witnesses]; Lee, 2015 [in the writing classroom]; Smith & Osborn, 2007 [in foreign language curriculum]). However, some reservations about, and harsh criticisms against, the integration of religions, especially Christianity, in ELT have been raised in the literature, mainly regarding possible proselytization (Edge, 2003; Foye, 2014; Varghese & Johnston, 2007). Furthermore, concerns have been raised over a lack of dialogue when English teachers bring religion into their classes (Pennycook, 2009). These concerns revolve around the issue of power differentials, especially between Western Christian English teachers and their non-Western, often non-Christian students. Save for Wang-McGrath's (2013) study of team-teaching involving both Western and local teachers in Taiwan, how power differentials are negotiated in ELT classrooms in non-Western EFL contexts by both Western and local teachers is still not sufficiently documented (Vandrick, 2009; Wong, 2013). Therefore, the current paper responds to the call for more research into the place of religion in a non-Western context like Indonesia. In a recent study in Indonesia,

Lessard-Clouston (2013) investigated how teachers in an Indonesian Christian university integrated faith in their teaching practices. However, the issue of religiously related power relations between EFL teachers and students or colleagues was not discussed.

Indonesia encourages the integration of religious values in (character) education (Qoyyimah, 2016). The Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945 stipulates: "The government advances science and technology along with holding religious values and national unity in high esteem with a view to promoting civilization as well as the well-being of humanity" (chapter 13 on Education, article 31, subsection 5 [Asian Human Rights Commission, 2002]). Moreover, at the time of data collection, a requirement for students or teacher-trainees (to be modeled by lecturers) in the ELT curriculum at a Christian university where I conducted my study reads: "Being able to reflect Christian values in teaching." The fact is that not all lecturers and students in the EFL teacher education program at the university are Christian.

Although the current study is based on a case in a university on the island of Java, Indonesia, it will be relevant to many other private and public educational institutions in different parts of the world where ELT stakeholders embrace different faiths. It can be predicted that students from Asia (especially Indonesia) and South America, who are religious (particularly Christian), may continue on their studies to English-speaking countries, especially Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. Therefore, Christian English language teachers and/or teacher educators in these countries need to be much more aware of many Asian students' sense of religious identity. Similarly, it is necessary for Christian English language teachers and/or teacher educators from English-speaking countries who are already or who will be living in religious countries to gain better understanding of power relations associated with the existence of various religious identities in ELT classrooms.

This paper hence aims to explore how EFL teachers reflected on their attempts to communicate their religious views to students. To that end, the current ELT literature on values, power (relations), and personal/interpersonal dialogues on faith will be reviewed in the following section.

Review of Literature

Values and Spirituality

Following Johnston (2003, p. 10), I use the term "values" interchangeably with

"morality" to mean "beliefs about what is right and good," as well as what is erroneous and bad. One of the dilemmas in ELT classrooms is whether teachers can foreground their "personal faith" or otherwise. Johnston (2003) fleshed out this dilemma stating "In what ways, and to what extent, should my religious and spiritual beliefs directly or indirectly influence my work in language classrooms?" (p. 146). However, Johnston is an atheist. He does explain how his atheism affects his classroom teaching, but in a way that contrasts what some Christians do. He does not feel a need to convert others to his beliefs. Likewise, Buzzelli and Johnston (2002, p. 4) argue that "our use of the word moral has nothing in common with … [US] right-wing Christian organizations." Therefore, it is not clear how religious beliefs influence their work in language classrooms. Ferris (2009) as a Christian, furthermore, seems more interested in improving students' mastery of language skills than in influencing students to embrace her "worldview on any issue, whether it be care for the environment, equality for women or homosexuals, war, poverty, oppression, gun control – or [her Christian] faith" (p. 212), especially in non-religious educational contexts. Similarly, as reported in Wong (2013), commitment to adhering only to learning objectives prevented one Christian English teacher working as a missionary in China from including a discussion about Christmas in the classroom. She stated: "Our finals ended before Christmas, and there was nothing that they needed to know about Christmas for the final so I didn't try to fit it in" (Wong, 2013, p. 23). Therefore, ELT educator-scholars like the atheistic Johnston and Christian educators like Ferris and the teacher in Wong's study have not answered the question of how overt discussion of religion affects their (moral) work in ELT classrooms.

In some other settings, religious views have influenced the ways English language teachers shape their pedagogy. For instance, based on interviews with five Christian English teachers living and working in Japan, Wicking (2014) found that they did not endorse overt evangelism. Instead, they put more emphasis on "personal virtues of love and respect," being highly professional, and "encouraging exploration of deeper life issues in class" (p. 45). The themes of love and professionalism also emerged in Baurain's (2012, 2015) studies. However, in Varghese and Johnston's (2007) study some Christian English teachers expressed their evangelical value overtly, though not aiming at overt proselytization. To be more specific, some US-based ESL Christian English teachers in Varghese and Johnston's (2007) study stated that "the right way was not to attempt conversion of others outright, but rather to *plant seeds*" (p.

18, italics in original) inside or outside of classroom contexts. The idea of planting seeds (or witnessing) has also been a major theme in Dormer's (2011) work and Baurain's (2012, 2015) studies. For example, a theme of "God is good" was used as teaching material in a Muslim elementary school in Indonesia (Dormer, 2011). Furthermore, in illustrating a distinction between witnessing and proselytizing, Baurain (2012) reported a response from a participant in his study:

> I never tried to convert anyone because I believed (and still believe) that it would be an abuse of the power-distance between teacher and student… However, the Holy Spirit can do a lot with open discussions and student friendships. (p. 325)

While the notions of "power-distance between teacher and student" and "open discussions" came to the fore, more is needed to theorize about power relations, which are associated with one's spirituality, in ELT contexts, not only from interviews with teachers, but also from their observed classrooms.

Before proceeding to a discussion about power in a bit more depth, it is necessary to be clearer first what is meant by spirituality and how it is related to religious faith. Van Brummelen, Koole, and Franklin (2004) assert that "[t]he scope of spirituality is broader than that of religion" (p. 238). Religion is commonly associated with creeds stipulated by religious organizations associated with faiths like Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. Religious values can be windows through which one's sense of spirituality is viewed, but a person can claim to be spiritual without adhering to religious creeds (Tisdell, 2007). In this article, English language teachers' spirituality coalesces with, but is not limited to, their Christian values. It is possible then to say that one's spirituality is either religiously based or otherwise, with the former being the primary topic of attention here. Apart from religiously based spirituality in which one seeks transcendence through God or a Divine Being, spirituality entails one's capacity of being self-reflexive and, in view of Astin (2004), being devoted to fostering a sense of community (see Mambu, 2017, for more detail on defining spirituality).

Power (relations)

From a Foucauldian perspective, it is erroneous to "see power as an evil that needs to be combated" (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002, p. 51). Power (differential) is a given that is not to be removed, but to be negotiated by educational stakeholders including English language teachers and students. As such it is inaccurate to think of teachers as those in a position of power while

regarding students as always powerless. Relations of power entail the likelihood that both students and teachers exert their power to negotiate their values. However, in teacher-student relations of power it is usually the teachers who have a stronger degree of authority in terms of getting students to do things or changing the students according to the teachers' values or sense of morality (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002). Scholars have been worried that ELT is used "as a means to convert the unsuspecting English language learner," which "raise[s] profound and political questions about what is going on in English classrooms around the world" (Pennycook & Makoni 2005, p. 137). Describing English language learners as "unsuspecting," these scholars portrayed the learners as weaker in their relation of power with (Christian) English teachers.

This concern has been challenged by my findings in the context of an undergraduate English language teacher education program in Indonesia (Mambu, 2016). For instance, being exposed to the Christian literature of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* introduced by a Western Christian missionary, Karno (a pseudonym of a Muslim student), an avid reader who does extensive reading without being told to do so by anyone, was not converted to Christianity. Rather, he was able to make a parallel between the spiritual journey of Christian (the main character in *The Pilgrim's Progress*) with hajj pilgrimage. This only strengthened his Islamic faith and at the same time Karno "did not challenge Christianity or accentuate the superiority of Islam, at least in my presence" (Mambu, 2016, p. 176). Similarly, Lukas (a pseudonym), a Buddhist student, has remained a Buddhist, although he attended a Communication Across Cultures course in which the instructor, Mr. Gate (a pseudonym), was an evangelical Christian. Lukas told me in an interview – transcribed verbatim:

> Mr. Gate, he always try to see that this is from my point of view, from my religion. But maybe from your religion is different. He never mean to offend other religions. So this is what he got in his religion. And he try to invite us from other religion to express our opinion about the same thing . . . [For example] Mr. Gate said that this is the Ten Commandments. And this is from the point of view of Christian. But he also tried to ask us from other religion whether [we] have the same thing or common thing. (Interview, March 25, 2014) (Mambu, 2016, p. 167)

This suggests, as far as Lukas' case is concerned, that Mr. Gate is open-minded and Lukas himself is not an "unsuspecting" English language learner who succumbs to the teacher's (evangelical) power without any hesitation. Mambu's (2016) study, however, is limited to English language learners' points of view. Teachers' own reflections on how they negotiated power differentials associated with their religion(s) in the ELT classroom warrant further

inquiry.

In his reflection, Snow (2009) admits that the English language has been inextricably linked to power for decades, thanks to past British colonialism and the current U.S. hegemony in the world's political, technological, and scholarship arena. This condition makes it difficult for Christian English teachers, especially missionaries who are also native speakers of English, to "carry out mission from a position of servanthood and humility" (p. 175). As a response to this difficulty, Snow suggests that native English speaking missionaries from Inner Circle countries like the United States become second language learners as an attempt to "'empty themselves' of power" (p. 182). However, the question of how a Christian English teacher empties him or herself of power and becomes a humble servant in ELT classrooms apart from being a second language learner still goes unanswered.

Reflecting on her own experience as a missionary kid, Vandrick (2009) implies that English language teachers should interrogate their privileged positions, especially those related to their religious belief. In so doing, teachers can mitigate power differentials between them and their students, which in turn allows the teachers to have dialogues with the students. Mossman (2015) has exemplified being a reflexive researcher. He acknowledges power associated with his "acquired" privileged identities (i.e., "unearned societal placement" as a White Canadian of European descent, a middle-class, evangelical, straight, and married Christian). He is also reflexive of his "ascribed" identities (e.g., his "spiritual gifts, passions, abilities, experiences, and personality") as an ELT practitioner (p. 23). It is not very clear, however, how his commitment to negotiating his privileged identities is put into practice, especially when interacting with multilingual transnational youth learning English as an additional language (EAL) at the Writing Centre of a university where he worked. Mossman did provide an example of how he encouraged volunteers at the Writing Centre to "create learning spaces with their clients" (or EAL students) "characterized by openness … and hospitality" (p. 32). Nonetheless, Mossman did not report his direct interaction with the EAL students and how he demonstrated reflexivity in relation to these students. Put another way, Mossman did not address head-on how he interrogated his position of power (or privileged identities) when interacting (or dialoguing) with the EAL students himself.

Faith-Related Dialogues

By "dialogic" Johnston (2003, p. 127) means not merely "saying things." Instead, a

dialogue requires "give and take." That is, participants of a dialogue do not simply exchange ideas but also "respond by building on or challenging each other's contributions." The problem is deciding what to give or to take from others or build on each other's contribution, when religious and secular values are oftentimes not in agreement. For atheist scholars, integrating religious values in class is quite probably of little importance. For religious believers however, religiously based spirituality is an inherent part of their personal dialogues and/or a major value to be communicated with others.

Canagarajah (2009) argues that he has to negotiate his knowledge of critical pedagogical scholarship and his Christian identity in representing himself in academia. Critical pedagogy encourages religious reflexivity (i.e., dialoguing with oneself to inspect power differentials with others due to his or her religious identity). The extent to which such reflexivity is made visible in interpersonal dialogues between English teachers and students is worth investigating. Relevant to the attempts to cultivate interfaith dialogues interpersonally are "guidelines for dealing with controversial issues" in ELT classrooms, which have been offered by Brown (2009, p. 267). First, it is crucial that students are provided with ample opportunities "to learn about important social/moral/ethical issues and to analyze all sides of an issue." Second, "an atmosphere of respect" to differences in terms of religion, race, and sexual orientation needs to be established by teachers. Third, some discipline measures need to be taken when students "show disrespect" concerning gender, race, and religion (Brown, 2009, p. 267). However, the extent to which teachers and students are able to have personal and interpersonal dialogues on religious and critical values in ELT classrooms is still largely unexplored.

Based on the above review, I raised this more specific research question: How did EFL teachers at an English Language Teacher Education program at an Indonesian university in Java reflect on the enactment of personal/interpersonal dialogues on faith-related issues and power with their students?

The Study

The larger case study (Mambu, 2014) on which the current article is based addresses how EFL teachers and students negotiated their spiritual identities and power relations associated with their spiritual identities.

Context

I conducted my case study in an undergraduate English teacher education program at Jawara Christian University (JCU; a pseudonym) in Java, Indonesia. The head of the program explained that JCU hosted around 700 students from 2009-2013 classes (or around 140 students per admission year on average) and over 20 tenured lecturers, with two of them Muslims. Based on JCU's student admission database, most of the students were Christian (i.e., approximately 67% for both Protestants and Catholics), with about 32% Muslims and less than 1% Hindus and Buddhists.

The distinction between teacher training (or TESOL) courses and EFL (or ESOL) classes is not clear-cut in EFL contexts. Similar to other programs in Indonesia, the English language education undergraduate program at JCU offers both EFL classes (usually in the first two years) and courses related to teacher training in the third and fourth years.

Participants

In my larger eight-month study (Mambu, 2014), I recruited 17 focal participants (i.e., six students and 11 lecturers) who embraced different faiths. One of the major criteria for recruiting them was their overt religiosity, which was apparent during my preliminary observations in their classes or was based on teachers' and/or students' reports. Being a Christian who was raised in a highly evangelical family and who is familiar with a critical Christian perspective to ELT (e.g., Canagarajah, 2009) helped me to notice English language teachers' performance of religious identity during the preliminary observations.

In this article, I select data from three focal-lecturer participants who are Christian on the grounds that they reported having integrated critical-reflexive values in interfaith encounters in ELT classrooms with much detail. These lecturers taught students who majored in English language teacher education at the undergraduate level (these lecturers are listed below).

1. Angela (a Christian female lecturer; a U.S. citizen affiliated with Mennonites; holding an M.A. in English literature and a certificate in the teaching of writing; in her early 30s);

2. Mustika (a Protestant female lecturer who had grown up in Java, with a bachelor's degree in EFL education and a master's degree in cultural studies; in her mid-40s);

3. Dika (a Roman Catholic female lecturer who had grown up in Java, with a bachelor's degree in EFL education and a master's degree in cultural studies; in her early 50).

These are their pseudonyms. Participants' responses are transcribed verbatim.

Data Elicitation Methods

Interview. Data from Angela, Mustika, and Dika were elicited in semi-structured individual interviews, ranging from 60 to 90 minutes. The interview questions that framed Angela's and Mustika's responses reported here are provided in the findings section.

Classroom Observation. I audio-recorded Dika's Intermediate Reading class February 13, 2014) when observing one of her teaching sessions. Prior to attending her class, Dika had told me that she would include a discussion about the JCU logo, which has a religious (i.e., Christian) symbolism to it.

Data Analysis

Two major emerging themes are discussed here: enacting dialogues on faith-related issues and the enactment of religious reflexivity. Each of these topics will be discussed in their own respective section. I will specifically analyze the ways these lecturers framed Christian discourse in English language classrooms. On the whole, the three lecturers foregrounded dialogical and critical values when discussing religious issues in their classrooms. The nuances of these lecturers' dialogical and critical values will be illuminated by Brown's (2009) perspective (e.g., analyzing multiple perspectives of an issue, and establishing an atmosphere of respect), among others.

Furthermore, in weaving the narratives of the three participants in the findings section, I am engaged in a Bakhtinian Dialogical Narrative Analysis. This analysis is, from Frank's (2012, pp. 34-37) perspective, committed to recognizing that "any individual voice is actually a dialogue between voices," "remain[ing] suspicious to… monologue," and "open[ing] continuing possibilities of listening and of responding to what is heard."

Limitations of the Study

At the time of data collection, the participants reported in the current article did not teach courses related to teacher training, but courses to develop English language skills and awareness of American culture and literature. Findings in the current study are therefore limited on the grounds that they cannot be generalized to teacher training/education courses. The generalizability of negotiating the place of Christianity in EFL classes is also restricted. Data

from Mustika and Angela were not based on my observation in their classes. I relied solely on their recalled narratives, rather than from dialogues that were recorded and transcribed from the teachers' discourse in class. In addition, from 23 observed class sessions taught by 10 EFL teachers/English language educators (including Dika's class, but not Mustika's and Angela's classes) over a two-month period in my larger study (Mambu, 2014), religious themes did appear in some classes. However, extended discussions about these themes only emerged in five class sessions of the Communication Across Cultures course taught by three different Christian English language teachers/teacher educators. It is hence quite difficult to extrapolate the findings here to EFL teaching in general.

Findings

Enacting Dialogues on Faith-related Issues through Critical Thinking and Respect

Angela. In a narrative, Angela told me how the 9/11 incident and its aftermath had inspired her to discuss issues of culture, which includes Christianity and Islam (e.g., American Islamophobia in her elective American Culture and Literature course). This narrative emerged after I asked the following question: "With some years of experience teaching in this institution [JCU] particularly, what do you think of your interaction with your students who have different religious faiths or religious backgrounds?" As an American, Angela wanted to learn more about Islam, and by "provid[ing] a safe space" for the students and her to talk about religion in the class, she hoped to "build better interfaith relationship with ... students." Angela was aware her attempt to dig out more about religious views from Indonesian EFL students was "pushing the envelope." She had observed that Indonesians talked more openly about religion than those in the United States, but "to a point" that did not disrupt harmony. Therefore, she tried not to be too pushy by saying this in an interview with me:

> Okay. We're gonna talk about this. Because I think it's important that we talk about religion in the classroom ... But we're gonna talk about it with my context. We can critique American culture. America post 9/11. Because I realize it's a delicate issue here. And I might make people feel a little bit *kurang enak* [awkward]. And if you want to compare it [i.e., America post 9/11] with your own culture, and see if this has similarities or differences, and apply this critique to your own culture, *silahkan* [please]. But they don't feel *terpaksa* [obliged]. They don't feel forced to try to build critical thinking. But not make it too uncomfortable. Cause this is really pushing the envelope, especially in Indonesian context. (Excerpt 1)

Angela's lessons were enhanced by media (e.g., songs, television shows, and movies) that depicted American cultures. A variety of media produced by "right" and "left" wingers were used so as to show the students many US people's purposes or motives in presenting their views of the 9/11 incident. A complication arose when one song with a highly Christian overtone was played in class. Angela actually wanted to tell her students that the song was used as an evangelical tool:

> I also had shown them ... Allen Jackson [who] wrote "Where were you when the World Stopped Turning?" … It's a song … told from the perspective of God. And he is saying, "I was there, in the building. I was there in the planes. I was there. People wanted to know where I was. But I was there." ... At the end it's like God asked the question, "But if you were in that situation, at that moment, would you have turned to me? Think about your life. Think about your death. If you were a victim of 9/11, would you have been calling out to me?" (Excerpt 2)

Angela even expressed a cautionary meta-commentary of the media she brought in class: "I'm not trying to evangelize you guys. I want you to see how people use this tragedy for their own purposes." However, this was not sufficient. Some Christian students had misunderstood her, saying that Angela was brave to be God's witness and evangelize in class: "I admire you because even in the class, … there's a way to like witness or evangelize." Some other students thought Angela "was trying to convert the Muslims." Even some of her Muslims students, from Angela's view, thought that "the very fact the teacher," or Angela herself, "is playing [the song] means that she [was] trying to evangelize us." Learning from this, Angela was determined to keep highlighting to her students that when she presented an (audio) clip with a Christian theme she did not want to convert her students to Christianity. Angela stated, "I was trying to ... show [students] how people were using this for their own religious agenda. And how people got terrified at Islamaphobia. I was trying to use it as a critical moment."

Angela's Christian students who misinterpreted her might initially think of her as a person who had the courage to "plant seeds" evangelically (Varghese & Johnston, 2007, p. 18). However, this is not the complete picture that Angela would like to depict. As a Mennonite missionary, Angela's teaching style was not to overtly preach the Gospel in class. Instead, as a Christian, her teaching approaches are much more in line with critical pedagogical values (e.g., commitment to cultivating critical thinking and respect [see Brown, 2009] as well as social

justice). Central to an attempt to nurture critical thinking is framing an evangelical discourse (see Excerpt 2) within a larger perspective of critical (media) discourse analysis.

That some of her students failed to notice Angela's decision not to be overtly evangelical did not diminish her intention to engage students in using their critical thinking capacity. As such, Angela's case contradicts Pennycook's (2009) serious doubt of Christian English teachers. He stated: "What I am profoundly against is arrogance, bigotry, self-righteousness, … anti-intellectualism, and hypocrisy. It is perhaps just my misfortune that [the Christian English teachers] I have had dealings with have had such attitudes in abundance" (p. 63). Angela was in no way an arrogant, self-righteous, or anti-intellectual person. Nor was she a bigot. Had she been a bigot, she would not have allowed her students to be involved in an interfaith dialogue where students, including the Muslims, could question her contribution (i.e., letting students know about the post-9/11 evangelical discourse in the USA) in a discussion about American Islamophobia. In light of Buzzelli and Johnston (2002, p. 53), Angela was aware of "the way power is used and negotiated" by her students, especially the Muslims who challenged her presentation of evangelical discourse in class.

Furthermore, being self-reflexive (or self-critical) of her use of evangelical discourse, which was misinterpreted, she went to a great length to ensure that her students (in subsequent meetings or semesters) did not misunderstand the presentation of an evangelical discourse framed in a critical manner. Foregrounding critical thinking here apparently demonstrates Angela's commitment to intellectualism.

Angela's use of Bahasa Indonesia (see Excerpt 1) is also interesting. In light of Snow's (2009) view of emptying oneself of power through learning (and using) a language other than English, Angela, though in an interview context, seems to have demonstrated her humility, at least before me. That is, she acknowledged the awkwardness (by saying *kurang enak*) of talking about a religious issue in her class. Moreover, what she said during the interview might also be what she had expressed in her class – the pronoun "you" in "And if you want to compare it…" apparently mimics what she said in class. That is, she requested her students – all of whom were Indonesians – politely (i.e., the use of *silahkan* [please]) to make a comparison and contrast between America post 9/11 and their own culture.

Being aware of power differentials between herself as an American white Christian English language teacher and her students, Angela also showed respect to her Indonesian

students. She was conscious of her power as a teacher who could more strongly "push the envelope" (see Excerpt 1), if she chose to. Angela could force her students to compare America post-9/11 and Indonesia critically in terms of interfaith relations. However, she was restrained from imposing that critical thinking on her students. Angela limited the scope of critical thinking for her students by asking them only to criticize religious tensions (especially Islamophobia) in the USA post 9/11, not their own (Indonesian religious) "culture." By not pushing the envelope, Angela created "an atmosphere of respect" for interreligious harmony in the class. That is, in view of Brown (2009, p. 267), Angela's "personal opinions or beliefs" in critical thinking on interfaith relations in Indonesia "remain sensitively covert." It could be really tempting for Angela to comment critically on "all sides of an issue" of interfaith relations in Indonesia in the English language classroom. Had she been critically overt about interreligious relations in Indonesia, Angela could have been viewed as either disrespectful to followers of a certain religion being critiqued, or coercive in that some students might resort to, in Brown's (2009, p. 267) phrasing, "thinking something because the teacher thinks that way." Overall, a self-critical (or religiously reflexive) value will help English teachers, who decide to incorporate religious issues into ELT classrooms, to balance critical thinking and respect when it comes to initiating interfaith dialogues with students.

In view of Frank (2012), Excerpts 1 and 2 indicate Angela's voice (i.e., to examine religious issues critically in her class) that was juxtaposed to other voices (e.g., her own discomfort in being pushy to her students; different Americans' interpretations of the 9/11 tragedy). As such, Angela was not monologic. Instead, she encouraged her students to provide responses, including the one on evangelizing, which was misinterpreted by the students.

Angela is a Westerner, so a question remains as to whether a Christian English teacher who grew up and was educated in a non-Western setting like Indonesia could handle religious issues critically and respectfully in English classrooms. Besides that, Angela's approach seems to be more confessional and self-critical than engaging students in religious reflexivity.

Enacting Religious Reflexivity with Students

Mustika. Using Phillis Wheatley's poem entitled *On Being Brought from Africa to America,* Mustika told me in an interview that in her English literature class she initiated a discussion about a contradiction in Christian history. Mustika's narrative of discussing the poem

in her class emerged because I heard from a student I interviewed earlier that Mustika brought it up in class. Commenting on the last part of the poem, Mustika stated: "Interestingly, at the end, … she reminded people 'Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain, may be refin'd, and join, th'angelic train.'" In Mustika's opinion, these last two lines of Wheatley's poem "can be one of the reminders for all Christians to see colors as something that should not hinder people from salvation." Then, as I perused the poem line by line during the interview, I came across "Their color is diabolic dye." Mustika chimed in: "some view our sable race with scornful eye." She interpreted it as "kind of admission [or acknowledgment] that there is discrimination. This is … criticism to Christianity itself." Asked to elaborate on what she meant, Mustika explained:

> [Phillis] was thankful that she was introduced to the savior [based on the first line of the poem – ''twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land']. So she converted to Christianity … Unfortunately, these Christian people – I got the idea that 'some few our sable race with scornful eye' – [are] referring to her color. [Phillis] was introduced to Christ by her mistress, [who] was white, [but] ironically 'some few our sable race with scornful eye.' (Excerpt 3)

The religious reflexivity on Mustika's part was to empathize with Phillis taking side with her fellow African Americans being oppressed by her fellow Christians, who happened to be racially white. The poem is seemingly too far removed from the students' local context and culture, as Mustika and her students are not "white Americans" themselves. However, the point here is not on the white and non-white distinction, but on what EFL learners can extrapolate from Phillis Wheatley's portrayal of racial discrimination in the United States. That is, Mustika called for religious "auto-critique" or reflexivity. As she put it: "So I also introduced to the students that this poem is kind of auto-critique to the believers. To the Christian believers." After that, Mustika explained how she attempted to foster religious auto-critique in her class by raising difficult questions to them, and wrapped up her stance on auto-critique.

> "What about you in real life? Will you be able to accept criticism toward you own religion? Or you would be angry when people criticize your religion?" Or, "can you criticize your own religion, in order that you learn more about what you believe?" So that was usually what I asked, when it came to the issues like this poem …

> The principle here is the ability to look at someone's belief more objectively, … to criticize practices of the believers' attempt to follow the teachings, … to compare the misconduct or mistreatment done by the believers, and to separate the believers from the belief. Because that is what commonly happens in our society: "Because you believe in

Christianity, so you are Christian. When you are doing bad, so Christianity is bad." That is what people usually think. And that's what I wanted my students to see. (Excerpt 4)

Through reflecting on how she discussed Phillis Wheatley's poem in her class, Mustika provides an example of today's Christian English teacher from a non-Western context who can frame a Christian discourse (see Excerpt 3) in a critical-reflexive way. From Buzzelli and Johnston's (2002) perspective, introducing reflexivity as a desirable value is Mustika's exercise of power to control classroom discussions.

Making herself (and her religion) vulnerable to criticism, Mustika attempted to mitigate power differentials between herself and her non-Christian students. Thus, Mustika's case defies Pennycook and Makoni (2005) and Pennycook (2009) who cast doubt on Christian English teachers' ability to be critical.

In contrast to Angela who was reserved about "pushing the envelope" concerning interfaith relations in the Indonesian context, Mustika challenged her students whether they could accept criticism toward their own religion (see Excerpt 4). Mustika might not analyze "all sides" (Brown, 2009) of discrimination, but she exemplified how dialogues on faith-related issues should start from oneself who, in light of Frank (2012, p. 35), "remain suspicious to … [her or his own] monologue." It is one thing for students to comment critically (and monologically) on another culture (e.g., Indonesian students examining the post-9/11 USA in Angela's class). It is another thing to scrutinize unfavorable practices associated with the students' own religions. Religious auto-criticism necessitates that a dialogue within oneself or an interpersonal dialogue be performed.

Dika. While data from Angela and Mustika was elicited in interviews, data from Dika is based on my classroom observation of her Intermediate Reading class. In a class session of the course, Dika introduced the notion of the logo on the grounds that verbal words are not the only channel of communication that people read.

Examining one's own religiously affiliated context is a form of religious reflexivity. After explaining different logos in business and political fields in her Intermediate Reading class on February 13, 2014, Dika showed the JCU logo and said:

That is why in the beginning, before we started, then I asked you to write what you think of the university. ... And now look at the logo. Now, do you think you have the meaning of the logo there? In your handout, you can read the meaning of the logo ... (Excerpt 5)

The students were then assigned to work in groups of three and answer Dika's questions: "Do you think the logo is the face of JCU today? … Do you think the logo fits your idea about JCU or JCU today as you know it?" These questions potentially nurture religious reflexivity. Dika said that students were not to be afraid of being dismissed if they are honest about any unpleasant thing about the university. She reminded the students of the necessity of interpreting a text, including the JCU logo, critically; that is, students are not simply "to accept what is stated, but to assess it, or examine it." A follow-up question was raised:

> If you think that the logo and your idea about the university as you know is different, then please discuss with your friends whether there are things that need to be changed in the logo, or whether there are things that the university should change, so that the logo will represent the face of JCU today. ... If you think that there is a match between the logo and the university as you know JCU today, then give reasons. If you think both don't match, then which ones should be changed. ... If there is something needs to be changed, in what ways should it be changed? (Excerpt 6)

Dika's justification of why the JCU logo is to be examined is as follows: "Because you are all here. You are members of the big family. You must know JCU very well. [JCU is] something you live in, something you partly depend your future on."

Students' responses varied. The students either did not want to change the logo because it was already "good," or they wanted to change it (e.g., "If the symbols use a picture of book more interesting"). One response was quite critical: "We think the reality in the college itself is not showing God to be first priority."

In view of Frank's (2012) Dialogical Narrative Analysis, I find it necessary to frame the issue of religious reflexivity in relation to JCU within Dika's larger narrative, not only within the context of her Intermediate Reading class which I observed. In an interview with Dika on March 26, 2014, when I asked her if there was something that made her uncomfortable in a focus group discussion (FGD) she participated in, she indicated that the presence of her Muslim colleague in the FGD prevented her from sharing her thoughts more fully. In the interview, she more comfortably narrated her experience of living in a Muslim-dominated neighborhood in greater Jakarta during the 1998 massive social riots. This feeling of insecurity led her to decide to move to the city where JCU is located. In her early years living very close to JCU she thought that it "should be strong because it's a Christian university." She added: "If JCU is not strong, it would be easier for fanatics of the majority religion in Indonesia to dominate the non-Muslims." Her hope seemed to fade over the years, nonetheless. As she put it: "the leaders [of the university]

talk about the progress of JCU, but in reality, they give priority to their own interests." Dika's subjective opinion seems to resonate with her student's critical statement: "We think the reality in the college itself is not showing God to be first priority." Thus, both Dika and her student co-constructed their JCU world or reality in a reflexive and critical manner.

In the same interview, I asked Dika what influenced her decision to use the JCU logo. She said:

> I bring JCU logo because I'm thinking of whether JCU is still like a Christian university or not. And so to make the students be aware of that JCU should be a Christian university. Something like that. And I think, not introduction but preliminary activity, when I asked them to write about what they think of JCU, ... many or most of them do not consider it as a Christian university … (Excerpt 7)

What I think is potentially illuminating from Dika's activity is her instruction in the class: "If you think that the logo and your idea about the university you know is different, then please discuss with your friends whether there are things that need to be changed in the logo." When I heard this, I remembered Janks's (2010, p. 25) notion of *design*. In her view, design "encompasses the idea of productive power – the ability to harness the multiplicity of semiotic systems across diverse cultural locations to challenge and change existing discourses" (p. 25). One such semiotic system is the JCU logo. Students and teachers at JCU were certainly not to change the JCU logo. One might then wonder why Dika in her instruction challenged the students to change the logo when they felt there was a gap between the logo and their thought of the university. Seemingly implied in Dika's response to me during an interview (see Excerpt 7 above) was actually her deep concern about the fading Christianity at JCU. Her conviction was that "the students should be aware … that JCU should be a Christian university." Accordingly, it seems that Dika's instruction in class is a semiotic system in itself which was intentionally used by her to challenge, in a subtle way, an existing discourse of indifference toward the quality of Christianity at JCU. Dika's challenge is closely linked to her Christian identity: "There was a time when I thought that JCU should be strong … If JCU is not strong [in its Christianity], it will be easier for extreme or fanatics of the majority religion in Indonesia then to dominate the non-Muslims." Overall, challenging her students to think of a possibility of changing the JCU logo is a powerful tool for Dika to call for her students' reflexivity toward the quality of Christianity at JCU.

Discussion

Based on the findings reported above, I will explore the interrelatedness of power, reflexivity, and dialogue. Power in Pennycook's (2001) view, following Foucault, "is not merely repressive but is also productive" (p. 91). Thus, power relations are not simply about relations between "powerful oppressors" and "the powerless oppressed." Rather, they are likely to be tied to people's exercise of productive power. Such power allows a person to employ various "semiotic systems" in different locations "to challenge and change existing discourses" (Janks, 2010, p. 25). Some examples of semiotic systems or signs that have been raised so far include (1) notions of critical thinking, respect, and Islamophobia, as well as the use of Bahasa Indonesia as a foreign language (in Angela's discourse); (2) notions of auto-criticism and salvation (in Mustika's discourse); and (3) the JCU logo (in Dika's classroom discourse). These semiotic systems have been utilized in various ways by these instructors to foster interfaith dialogues in their classes, in hopes that existing "unfavorable" perspectives such as Islamophobia, religious close-mindedness, and indifference toward Christian values in JCU will be confronted, if not also altered.

Teachers' productive power, moreover, means that their power is not to be understood always negatively. For instance, power should not always be connoted with manipulating and coercing students into believing that Christianity is the best religion in the world. Power can also mean the capacity to cast a reflective-critical gaze on individual teachers' own teaching practices that are influenced by their religious beliefs (e.g., using many biblical expressions that alienate non-Christian EFL students) and to initiate (inter-faith) dialogue with students. To illustrate, Dika raised a series of open-ended questions (see Excerpt 6) that made it possible for her students to productively extend the dialogue on the degree to which the JCU logo reflected students' lived realities in the university.

In line with Canagarajah (2009), I have positioned myself as both a Christian and a critical pedagogue in this article and my larger study (Mambu, 2014). As a Christian I fully trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and am willing to obey His commands. Though not always successful, I am committed to displaying the spirit of servanthood in my workplace as an English language teacher educator. As a critical pedagogue, I cherish social justice, (inter-faith) dialogue, and critical-reflexive interrogation of my power and privileges associated with Christian interpretations and practices. Similar to Mustika, for instance, I am called to question

discriminations, be they on a racial basis or a religious ground. Admittedly, I might not be considered to be critical pedagogic enough – Canagarajah encounters this difficulty, too. My critical pedagogy is relatively limited in that the yardstick against which its interpretations and applications are measured is my current beliefs that I think are not contrary to biblical principles. As a Christian critical pedagogue, I am eager to stand up for social justice for the economically poor. I endorse countering dominations by a religious majority, without violence but through dialogue. I can learn from Dika who fostered such a dialogue in her class by raising her students' awareness of the extent to which Christianity was influential at JCU. I also intend to fight discrimination against religious minorities with love. In addition to CP principles that I support, I believe that planting seeds of the Gospel through my words (especially when asked by non-Christians) is important. More broadly, it is possible for Christian English teachers/teacher educators to be critical and reflexive without having to embrace "pure" secularly relativistic CP.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

English language teachers working in (and from) a non-Western context (e.g., Indonesia) can, and must even be encouraged to, incorporate religious values into ELT. However, the larger issue of power relations associated with religious beliefs of ELT stakeholders in local contexts remains salient. To address and take into account power differentials in dialogues on faith-related issues, a Christian English language teacher/teacher educator needs to foster and model a critical-reflexive thinking/stance without having to lose his or her Christian identity. This stance emphasizes:

1. interrogating Christian interpretations and practices that damage humanity in the name of religion (like Mustika), as well as those which contradict ELT stakeholders' sense of Christian identity – recall Dika and her student who were seemingly disillusioned by how Christianity was practiced at JCU;
2. showing respect and humility to students embracing beliefs other than one's own.

In content EFL-related courses like Cross-Cultural Communication and skill courses like reading and speaking, students need increased awareness of sociocultural norms across communities, particularly religious and academic communities which have different values and dogmas. In these courses, students also need to practice how to frame their spoken and written discourse in ways that are honest or transparent and yet do not impose their religious beliefs on

others.

While the current article discusses English language teachers' narratives, the principles of interfaith dialogues and religious reflexivity are highly relevant to components of language teacher education curriculum that prepare prospective English language teachers. In terms of vocabulary words, students in a language teacher education program can learn notions such as "left" and "right" wingers, "Islamophobia," "evangelical Christian," etc., in order for them to be conscious of global issues related to religious faiths, especially if they plan to move to (or imagine living and doing further studies in) English-speaking countries like the United States. Also crucial is providing opportunities for students to talk about religious issues in local contexts or within their own cultures.

The seed of religious reflexivity has been planted in Mustika's class; nevertheless, with the exception of my findings in Mambu (2016) of a Muslim student criticizing the presence of a radical Muslim group known as FPI (Front Pembela Islam/Islamic Defenders Front), little is known about how EFL students address local issues critically-reflexively. Future studies that initiate and/or document critical-reflexive discussions about local ethnic and religious tensions in ESL/EFL classrooms and/or online learning spaces are hence necessary.

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