Almost 20 years ago Sandra McKay and Nancy Hornberger (1996: 461) argued that language teaching needed to be informed by insights from sociolinguistics, given that ‘education is the site where, on the one hand, larger social and political forces are reflected in the kinds of educational opportunities offered to speakers of different language varieties and, on the other, language use mediates their participation in those opportunities and, ultimately, their potential contributions to the larger society’. While it is still the case that language teaching needs sociolinguistics, it is also true that McKay and Hornberger’s plea fell largely on deaf ears, certainly as far as the production of ELT materials is concerned. This paper begins with a short discussion of the supposed demise of the working class before moving on to a discussion of what class means in the highly complex world we live in today and how it has been addressed in sociolinguistics. The paper reports on the analysis of a set of textbooks dating from the 1970s to the end of the first decade of the 21st century which reveals a largely superficial treatment of class in general and a progressive editing out of working class characters and issues relating to working class life (Gray & Block, 2013). The paper concludes by arguing that this writing out of the working class can be seen as indicative not only of ELT’s failure to engage with insights derived from sociolinguistics, but also a failure to educate students (by providing them with a very a skewed view of the world), and a simultaneous betrayal of working class language learners who are denied recognition.

Keywords: English language teaching, neoliberalism, Social class.