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Preface: On Developing Fluency in Humaning

Maggie Kubanyiova

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A discipline that deals with questions of *education, language* and *'other'* should probably have something useful to say about how we (teach or learn to) live our lives in the world of diverse others. If this aspiration is anything close to shared within the TESOL community, it is hard to imagine TESOL teacher education that does not explicitly engage with its sociopolitical agenda. Such an agenda has, of course, for better or worse, always shaped TESOL (teacher education) debates and pedagogies, not to mention spaces in which these have occurred. The politics, in other words, have always been there. Present and powerful. The silences that have often surrounded such questions have had less to do with their relevance and infinitely more to do with the politics of platform.

Judging from the debates that have increasingly claimed that platform, discourse has been shifting rapidly over the past few years. There's no doubt that the change has been accelerated by recent momentous sociopolitical events that have shaken the world. Especially those parts of it that have, despite consistent bids for interruptions, tended to exude unshakeable confidence in a mandate to guard that platform and mold an exportable variety of TESOL; one that can and must strive to resist inconveniences of context. There is now an acute awareness in some of those corners that TESOL, just like any other area of education, cannot be divorced from the world in which it is practised and in which it is meant to intervene. Its central concern with a specific language heightens this imperative: the language of opportunity and oppression, erudition and erasure, conviviality and colonization, development and depletion; in short, the language of stark contrasts and paradoxes compels the world of TESOL to expose its societal assumptions and face its political consequences.

This volume enters the picture in such a moment of reckoning and joins the ever-intensifying chorus of voices to ask what this growing sociopolitical consciousness might mean for TESOL teacher education and for public bodies established to support it and advocate for it. I see the chapters assembled here as

revolving around two fundamental understandings shared by the broader domain of applied linguistics: that reducing people to labels is a damaging way of living in the world of diverse others and that doing the same to people's language can often have the same effect. How these insights might translate into TESOL teacher education curricula and pedagogies is what this book helps those charged with designing and implementing them to ponder.

The chapters lay out ways in which essentializing difference in TESOL research, practice or policy veils the uniqueness of circumstances and the heterogeneity of needs. This is true of students, their teachers and their teacher educators. Native speakerism, for instance, and the discriminatory practices associated with it have not gone away despite a longstanding movement within the academy, professional organisations and public bodies. But we are also reminded of a similarly reductive effect of its counter-ideology, nonnative speakerism. Both forms build hierarchies, neither serves the cause.

Just what that cause is or should be is in fact central to the discipline's reflection on its sociopolitical agenda. Efforts to reduce the "achievement gap" of students in US mainstream education for whom English is an additional language sound like a worthwhile cause for TESOL and therefore for TESOL teacher education in those specific settings. Until its fallacy is exposed through a meticulous examination of linguistic and value assumptions behind measures designed to push an agenda which misses its elephants. Such as an "opportunity gap." Or the fact that failing to meet arbitrary proficiency criteria marks one as a non-achiever for life, a non-citizen, a security threat, and, unspeakably, a non-person (Flores & Rosa, 2019; Khan, 2019). Striving nevertheless to conform to such benchmarks in tests and in relationships is often done out of hope for acceptance or safety from the violence of dehumanization. It is often encouraged "out of (a sometimes misguided) love. A love that tells people that who they are isn't enough, but that they can at least perform in a way that will make others believe they are enough until an ecosystem fully embraces them" (Abdurraqib, 2021, p. 91). Helping TESOL professionals to get closer to these soul piercing truths as part of their education, the truths that govern their students' lives and probably their own too, will not dismantle such an ecosystem. But it might get closer to disturbing it (Sharma, Allen, & Ibrahim, 2022; Si'ilata, 2019).

Along with the broader debates in applied linguistics (Bagga-Gupta, 2018; Canagarajah, 2013; Creese & Blackledge, 2019; Krause, 2022; Kubota, 2013; Moriarty & Kusters, 2021; Valente, 2020), this volume helps us appreciate how labelling language varieties, speakerhoods or proficiencies is an ideological process that has its place but misses what matters most: how people actually use

language to relate to one another and to the world around them. That it is not in judging what language should be, but in paying attention to what it is already doing that new vistas for socio-politically engaged TESOL teacher education can open up. The many examples of teacher education initiatives discussed here, be it through the critically conscious narrative reflections or the rich descriptive accounts of teachers' and teacher educators' community building efforts, are instructive and necessary. They also present additional opportunities: to become the very spaces in which historically, spatially and biographically situated, fluid and embodied communication practices that cross all sorts of boundaries in order to make contact with others become a firm focus of attention and TESOL teacher education praxis.

Doing so will enable the discipline to remain in close conversation with what I suggested in the introduction might be its bigger purpose. It is one which is pointing away from an imposition of a fixed notion of what language is, what it sounds like or whose language counts, and towards a fuller participation in ongoing "humaning", which is how Erasmus (2018, p. xxii) writes about "life-in-the-making with others." Paying attention to language as lived life and fully participating in it is the kind of language (teacher) education that helps to grow a sense of when to speak, what to say, and, mostly, how to listen in order to encounter the other. I would venture to suggest that this might well be the most radical part of the sociopolitical agenda for TESOL and, by extension, for TESOL teacher education: to enable those participating in it to develop their fluency in humaning. It is one that is neither acquired nor learned and it is therefore impossible to *equip* anyone *for* it. But TESOL teacher education can become the space that allows teachers, and then their students, to *open* themselves *to* it.

Because it is this fluency in being neighbours to one another when it's impossible to breathe and our home is burning that, to my mind, should occupy our minds. It is not a concern that somehow stands apart from TESOL. Acknowledging that TESOL, on the contrary, is very much part of it is what books such as these enable the larger community to do, even if it might not come easily (Motha, 2020). The chapters in this volume exemplify how TESOL teacher education can help locate the act of doing TESOL, for which the teachers are practicing, in its larger ecology of educational systems, societal structures, and, I would add, the natural environment. But a reminder that it is precisely this kind of fluency that teachers will ultimately be asked to teach their students must be central to this discussion. Who the teachers are and the biographies, stigmas, visions and activism that they uniquely bring to their educational relationships matter greatly. They can only educate as themselves, not as someone else. But

socio-politically-conscious TESOL teacher education is one that also teaches educators to leave the scene to let their students engage in “life-in-the-making with others.” As themselves, not as someone else.

The chapters in this volume testify that pursuing TESOL teacher education with socio-political sensibilities in mind but without the larger society’s support can and does easily lead to frustration, burn out, and resignation. It is not easy to lead a major international organization, an institution, a teacher education programme, a teacher development initiative, when it’s part of a society or a system that seems patently uninterested in what cannot be counted and is even less invested in what it deems not to count. When the society is not ready to listen and do its bit, the act of language (teacher) education is easily stifled before it’s had a chance to take root. But the chapters offered in this book also show that openings for resisting and acting responsively (Kubanyiova, 2020), however constrained and seemingly inconsequential, do exist (cf. Kuchah, 2020). The resignation that comes with deliberately turning away from them is the more dangerous variety and one to which the history of TESOL teacher education will not be kind. That is the point and strength of volumes such as this: to compel the TESOL community as a whole not to look the other way.

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