

Becoming Critical Sociolinguists in TESOL Through Translanguaging and Embodied Practice

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This Perspectives article proposes a renewed vision of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) through a translanguaging (TL) stance, grounded in critical sociolinguistic inquiry and embodied practice. A TL theory of language asserts an activist agenda to dismantle mono/lingualism, inviting a more dynamic and expansive view of multilingualism that actively challenges linguistic hierarchies and associated ideologies to recognize networks of meaning distributed across linguistic and nonlinguistic forms. This openness to all resources beyond language commensurates with the emerging posthumanist and new materialist perspectives in applied linguistics to consider how bodies, objects, and space intersect as wider assemblages, inciting critical citizenship in ethical interdependence between the human and natural world. Grounded in this understanding, we propose a systematic, coherent TL methodology for TESOL and teacher education, engaging teachers and students in critical sociolinguistic inquiry and embodied practice to support interrogation of language and power, mapping inter- and intra-actions in the human, social and eco-environment. With this approach teachers might explore with students' ways of doing/being/ knowing in reflexivity towards all forms of inequities, particularly one's privilege and complicity and what ethical responsibility entails in the sociocultural, sociopolitical, and eco-world. Providing examples from classroom studies and teacher education research, we discuss implications for both K–12 classrooms and postsecondary educational contexts.

Cet article de Perspectives propose une vision renouvelée de l'enseignement de l'anglais aux locuteurs d'autres langues (TESOL) par une approche de translanguaging, ancré dans l'enquête sociolinguistique et la pratique incarnée. Une théorie de translanguaging affirme qu'un agenda activiste ayant pour but de démanteler le monolinguisme invite à une vision plus large et plus dynamique du multilinguisme qui remet activement en question les hiérarchies linguistiques et les idéologies associées pour reconnaître les réseaux de sens distribués dans toutes les formes linguistiques et non linguistiques. Cette ouverture à toutes les ressources au-delà de la langue se mesure avec les perspectives posthumanistes émergentes et nouvelles matérialistes en linguistique appliquée pour envisager comment les corps, les objets et l'espace se croisent en de vastes assemblages, incitant à la citoyenneté critique dans l'interdépendance éthique entre les humains et le monde naturel. Ancré dans la compréhension, nous proposons une

méthodologie du translanguaging systématique et cohérente pour le TESOL et pour la formation des enseignants, engageant les enseignants et les étudiants dans l'enquête sociolinguistique et la pratique incarnée pour soutenir l'interrogation du langage et du pouvoir, la cartographie des inter- et intra-actions dans l'éco-milieu humain et social. Avec cette approche, les enseignants pourraient explorer les façons de faire/d'être/de savoir avec les étudiants dans la réflexivité envers toutes les formes d'inégalité, particulièrement son privilège, la complicité et ce que la responsabilité éthique recouvre dans l'éco-monde socioculturel et sociopolitique. En fournissant des exemples tirés d'études en salle de classe, et de la recherche en formation des enseignants, nous discutons des implications à la fois pour les contextes de salle de classe de la maternelle à la 12e année et les contextes d'enseignement postsecondaires.

Keywords: TESOL, language education, language teaching, translanguaging, critical sociolinguistics, posthumanism, new materialism, teacher education

This article aims to assert and outline a renewed vision of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) through a translanguaging (TL) stance, emphasizing critical sociolinguistic inquiry and embodied practice to engender alternative understandings of language, curriculum, and identities of teachers and students. In particular, we articulate a process-oriented approach whereby teachers engage in situated research with their students into language practice, shifting both from passive recipients to contributors of knowledge/theory construction in TESOL. This reframing is particularly significant in light of new linguistic theories and pedagogical approaches in language teaching and learning. While a TL theory of language (García & Li, 2014)—and other multilingual perspectives such as plurilingualism (Coste et al., 2009)—has revisioned the field in theory and in practice, it has also left teachers to wrestle with shifting terrain. In this article, we synthesize an emergent vision aligned with critical applied linguistics, particularly posthumanist and new materialist perspectives, proposing a systematic and coherent TL methodology for TESOL and teacher education. Whereas recent scholarship has begun to articulate what TL brings to TESOL to address social diversity and equity, little has been written about posthumanist and new materialist approaches. Putting forward a heuristic model for this TL methodology, this conceptualization offers a broader and more encompassing trans-systemic approach than the earlier theorizations in TL scholarship to help articulate teaching and learning practices that fully reflect, mobilize, and strengthen assemblages of meaning making and repertoires of practice across the human/nonhuman world. Providing examples from classroom studies and teacher education research, we discuss implications for both K–12 classrooms and postsecondary educational contexts.

Rationale for a TL Methodology in TESOL

Drawing on experience in language and teacher education across K–12 and postsecondary contexts both in Canada and other countries, we have come to understand that while textbooks and ready-made resources are useful references, teaching and learning comes alive when it connects with who students are and what concerns and interests them, which generates possibilities for sociolinguistic inquiry and anchors language learning and use in addressing social issues. However, current dominant approaches to TESOL continue to follow the ideology of pragmatism (Benesch, 1993), frequently dominated by skills-based curricula (i.e., reading, writing, listening, speaking) and structured, prescriptive, and generalized teaching strategies, methods and approaches (see for example, TESL Ontario Competency Framework for Adult ESL Teachers [TESL Ontario, 2021]). Thematic units of instruction such as transportation and travel, employment, health and the environment, and so on, are useful yet sometimes formulaic or reductive, producing a contrived context that does not speak to students' complex realities and circumstances. Unless grounded in problem-posing inquiry, this pragmatic approach can reinforce and uphold the status quo, rather than allowing students to recognize, explore, and question how such topics can affect personal, political, economic, and cultural lives.

Prevailing practice across levels of English language instruction focuses mainly on students' learning of and access to the so-called "standard English," even though research has documented how teachers have made concerted efforts to disrupt English hegemony by including students' home languages or multilingual and multimodal resources (Early et al., 2015; Lotherington & Jenson, 2011; Ntelioglou et al., 2014; Stille & Prasad, 2015). Within the educational context, such efforts have been made to promote multilingual students' academic learning while shifting teachers' views on engaging students in academic discourses (Accurso & Gebhard, 2020). However, multilingual approaches, rooted in TESOL's disciplinary home in applied linguistics and its monolingual habitus, operate mainly as a scaffold of English learning, and are now being rethought in light of a heteroglossic understanding of language which "asserts a dynamic, permeable and composite view of bilingualism" (Lau & Van Viegen, 2020, p. 8). Recent critical applied linguistics research and scholarship contend that a paradigm operating from a scaffolding perspective might only reaffirm English dominance (Flores & Rosa, 2015; García et al., 2021) wherein linguistic hierarchies continue to prevail across English as an additional language (EAL), English for academic purposes (EAP), and English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching contexts. For instance, high-stakes monolingual English language tests, standardized literacy exams, and language proficiency assessment frameworks frequently shape teaching and learning, function as gatekeepers, and determine students' educational pathways and access to higher education (e.g., Portfolio-Based Language

Assessment and Canadian Language Benchmarks used in federally-funded Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada [LINC] programs [Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2019]; Alberta K–12 ESL Proficiency Benchmarks (Alberta Education, 2012); and Steps to English Proficiency in Ontario education [Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012]). These assessments tend to institutionalize monolingualism, perpetuating “enduring perspectives on languages as separate and bounded entities” (Lau & Van Viegen, 2020, p. 8). However, even when pressed to operate in monolingual mode, students’ use of their full range of language resources persists (Li, 2018). This agentic move points to the critical value and importance of students’ linguistic repertoire not only to their learning and their identifications and cultural backgrounds, but also, importantly, to the strength and alliance of their communities. Thus, rather than merely scaffolding students to succeed in the current system, we take up the call from García et al. (2021) to focus on the ongoing coloniality inherent in the system: “By rejecting abyssal thinking and focusing on the vast linguistic complexity and heterogeneity of people and languages, we challenge the line itself rather than simply help people live with or overcome it” (p. 3). Mindful of the aim to legitimize the presence and politics of minoritized languages in and out of teaching and learning contexts, we recognize Mignolo’s (2007) “grammar of de-coloniality” to highlight the need to actively challenge “pretended universality” imposed by European worldviews, to make way for other principles of knowledge, ethics, and being an other-universality or pluriversality (p. 453). As such, we maintain a critical agenda that actively challenges linguistic hierarchies and their associated ideologies, going beyond merely upholding the legitimacy of partial and uneven competence for speakers, to advocating for all minoritized multilingual beings and resources (García & Otheguy, 2019).

Moving Beyond an Anthropocentric Perspective in TESOL

Canadian researchers have well documented how language and power play out in and outside classroom settings (see for instance, Ball & McIvor, 2013; Cummins, 2000; Haque, 2018; Kubota & Bale, 2020; Lee, 2015; Sterzuk, 2011). For example, minoritized speakers often get misheard when they use Creole, hybrid or “nonstandard” varieties, which is tied to longstanding histories of colonial and neocolonial relations that burden the subjugated speaker to meet an always-moving and impossible standard determined by the oppressor (Flores & Rosa, 2015; García et al, 2021; Motha, 2014). In these cases, it is the body imprinted with racialized, gendered, and class-based historical legacies that speaks, and is read and misread, and heard and misheard—language learning and use have never been contextless and body-less. While these humanist concerns and inequities are urgent, they remain situated in an anthropocentric (human-centred) standpoint.

Recent scholarship in new materialism and posthumanism moves our thinking of language to processes, involving actions, inter-actions, and intra-actions between and among the cognitive, social, affective, and material dimensions of human and nonhuman interactants (Pennycook, 2018; Thibault, 2017; Toohey et al., 2020). Indigenous scholars have taught us that language is part of land, place, and nonhuman beings. For instance, through her writing about English teaching, our Naskapi-Cree colleague (Robinson, 2021) has shown us that understanding the English word “caribou” for Naskapi children is not merely about learning to decode, spell, or pronounce the word and understand its meaning, but more importantly, to behold what the animal means to their lives and how they relate to the whole eco-community. In this sense, language use and practices are embodied, situated, and inter-animated with the living and nonliving, human and nonhuman, entangled assemblages of meaning and meaning making. Language and literacy (particularly print-based) have been regarded as privileged representational practices, raising the question of what is missing in understanding meaning and meaning making from a merely humanist perspective. Poststructuralist perspectives have already pointed out that critique solely based on language and reason alone (i.e., logo- and verbo-centric critique) (Janks, 2002) is not enough; instead, posthumanist and new materialist philosophies extend conceptual and methodological potentialities that highlight the emerging continuity, connectivity, and exchangeability among things that come into relation with each other (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2005; see also Braidotti, 2013; Massumi, 2002). We draw on this understanding to apprehend a more holistic picture of how bodies, materials, and space intersect as wider assemblages, inciting critical citizenship in ethical interdependence between the human and natural world.

At this moment, we use TL as a lens through which to bypass mono/lingualism, the privileging of *one* language over the other and the concordant reification of linguistic resources over other paralinguistic, affective, multimodal, spatial, and eco-resources. Indeed, scholars have recently underscored the “emergent networks of meaning” (García et al, 2021) distributed across linguistic and nonlinguistic forms, drawing attention to language and meaning as a fundamentally “multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal resource” (Li, 2018, p. 22) and to *trans*-semiotize between and among these resources to create more meaning (Lin et al., 2020). Encompassing a trans-systemic approach, TL can help to articulate our aim of more fully reflecting, mobilizing, and strengthening assemblages of meaning making and repertoires of practice across the human/nonhuman world, offering a broader and more encompassing view than earlier theorizations in TL scholarship. Further, we recognize the “trans-” and the progressive form “~ing” in TL as pointing to the in-between, inter and intra as well as the liminal spaces and the ongoing, undifferentiated flows of meaning and meaning making. Particularly, we draw on Thibault’s (2017) understanding

of language as dynamic and biosocial, involving distributed affective, sociocognitive, and sociomaterial processes. Importantly, these theoretical discussions highlight the shift, in recent years, to articulate ethics, ontology, and epistemology of applied linguistics that is inclusive of not only linguistic form and sociopolitical dimensions of language practices but also ecological and posthumanist approaches (Appleby & Pennycook, 2017, Pennycook, 2020).

TL Methodology in TESOL—Critical Sociolinguistic Inquiry and Embodied Practice

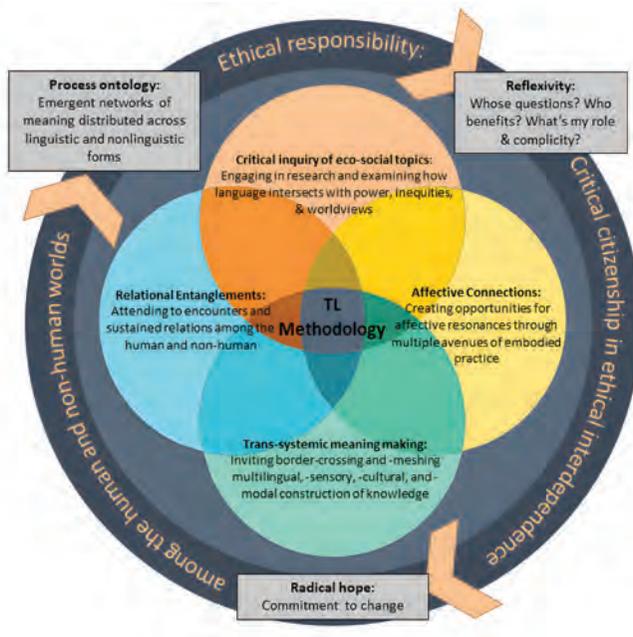
We define TL methodology in TESOL as **critical sociolinguistic inquiry and embodied practice**, with teachers and their students engaging in observing, documenting, analyzing and re/configuring how language is felt, experienced, and lived in a singular, enmeshed human/nonhuman world. Building on the current conceptualization of TL as going between and beyond language, our proposed method extends to include the affective and sociomaterial assemblages of meaning making and to make visible the network of activities and intra/inter-actions that are always in flow, in movement among, and in relation to, the human and nonhuman (including technologies, space and place, and bio-life) (Appleby & Pennycook, 2017; Bangou et al., 2019; Canagarajah, 2018; Lin et al., 2020; Pennycook, 2018; Toohey, 2018). In Canada, some language and literacy education research is moving beyond an anthropocentric perspective (e.g., Budach & Sharoyan, 2020; Dagenais et al., 2020; Smythe et al., 2017; Toohey et al., 2020), and similar shifts can be seen in arts-based and participatory educational research with teachers and students documenting sensory landscapes and somatic and affective knowing (e.g., Perry & Medina, 2011; Springgay & Truman, 2017). Such efforts engage theory and fieldwork to make visible networks of meaning making beyond print-based texts, to engage with one's "whole-body sense-making repertoire to co-act with the people or other living things, the space, and the tools and material space for enhanced and deepened understanding and reflections on how we might participate to recreate more desirable and hopeful socio-spatial relationships" (Lau et al., 2021). Taken together, we suggest that such insights can be brought to the curricular core of TESOL through a TL methodology to facilitate reflexivity and ethical responsibility towards all forms of inequities, particularly, one's privilege and complicity in the sociocultural, sociopolitical, and eco-world. From this position, we can engage teachers and students in exploring ways of "doing/being/knowing (ethico-onto-epistemology) literacies" (Kuby, 2017, p. 878).

Current approaches to TL in TESOL recognize, re-claim and access the multitude of linguistic and cultural resources, which theorists recently suggest extending to all other semiotic resources distributed across bodies,

minds, artefacts, and materials (Li, 2018; Lin et al., 2020; Thibault, 2017). These multilingual, multisensory, and multimodal resources are being, and can be, engaged to explicitly address how language teaching and learning are caught up with pressing ethical questions concerning socioeconomic and ecological catastrophes, racial and political divides, as well as health and well-being of people, communities and the bio- and eco-sphere. We frame these emerging practices in TESOL into a more systematic methodology—**critical sociolinguistic inquiry and embodied practice**—to focus not on a singular linguistic competence per se but to expand students’ distributed repertoires of practice to open critical learning spaces, and to question, play with, and reimagine new possibilities of doing, being, and knowing *in relation*. The collective effort to move towards more expansive and distributed understandings and such holistic considerations of human and nonhuman repertoires of practice bring us to thresholds that invite border crossing and meshing, albeit the sociopolitically imposed and human-centric nature of these boundaries. Reflecting on both the theory of language we bring with us to the classroom (ontology) and the ways in which we come to know and expand practices (epistemology), educators and their students can work at these liminal edges for transformed engagement (ethics).

Although real-world classroom practices seldom lend themselves to neat and tidy categories, below we offer a heuristic model (Figure 1) to synthesize the methodology such that it may be useful to inspire instructional planning and practice, rather than as a set of prescriptive teaching strategies or fixed understanding. The model comprises two layers—the outer layer is a set of squares encircled and encompassed by a continuous line that articulates ontological dimensions or ways of thinking that underpin a TL methodology, and the inner layer is a set of circles elaborating epistemological dimensions or ways of enacting a TL methodology.

Figure 1
Translanguaging (TL) Methodology in TESOL



In this model, the ontological dimension of TL methodology addresses an **ethical responsibility** that accounts for the interdependence among the human and nonhuman worlds, including **reflexivity** towards one's privilege and complicity and **radical hope** towards new possible futures. It underscores a **process ontology** that views knowledge as emergent, connected flows distributed across linguistic and nonlinguistic forms that emphasize the process of becoming. The epistemological dimension invites ways of enacting TL methodology, including classroom practices of **critical inquiry** into eco-social concerns and crises and **affective connections** and feelings towards such issues. Through these engagements, knowledge and understanding arises in **trans-systemic meaning making** across **relational entanglements** that include both encounters and sustained relations among human and nonhuman. With this proposed methodology, we advocate for educators and students to become together inquirers of language, engaging in doing/being/knowing as critical sociolinguists in their own right, adopting and enacting a critical TL stance and embodied practice to identify and problematize how meanings arise and function to promote, restrict, or render invisible certain values in eco-sociopolitical contexts.

Teachers and Students Doing/Being/Knowing as Critical Sociolinguists

This last section synthesizes examples from research literature, gathering empirical insights from studies conducted by researchers/educators who have collaborated with their students across a range of educational settings in various research projects, as persistent advocates for social and eco-justice and champions of equitable approaches to education practice. Together, they have actively orchestrated spaces, working within and against structural limits and ideological constraints, for critical and creative approaches to inquire about language with their students. Illustrating for us how to teach through critical sociolinguistic inquiry into everyday- and school-based language practices, these studies explore how language functions and intersects with power, drawing attention to cultural, eco-social and political circumstances that mediate language teaching and use. These studies bring to life an expanded view of TL in TESOL as described earlier, showcasing the ethico-onto-epistemological dimensions presented in our model for doing/being/knowing as critical sociolinguists.

López-Gopar et al.'s study (2020) in Oaxaca, Mexico, documented how teacher educators engaged their pre-service teachers in praxicum, conducting a critical ethnographic action research project to gather students' concerns and interests as well as their linguistic and sociocultural funds of knowledge, based on which they designed learning units driven by social needs. One group of pre-service teachers, in response to rural communities' experiences with malnutrition, engaged children in critical examination of the topic of healthy nutrition, local farming practices, and foodways. Anchoring English grammar and vocabulary teaching and learning in this critical eco-social inquiry, the children explored the contribution and value of traditional foods to their diet, reclaiming and expanding their repertoire of practice across Spanish, English, and local Indigenous languages.

Linguistic landscaping has been used as a pedagogical activity through which to develop critical awareness with educators. Sterzuk (2020) engaged pre-service teachers in observing and analyzing geographical and metaphorical spaces, beginning with photo documentation of signs and textual practices in their communities. Pre-service teachers were prompted to critically reflect on their cultural and linguistic location, on the people who live in these spaces and on the languages of Indigenous peoples and migrants. They also gathered insights from Indigenous Elders and their own families to discover stories about language use and language loss. Taken together, these activities connected teacher education with the legacies of colonialism, inviting analysis of how White settlers tend to be centred in educational practice. Similar linguistic landscaping studies have been conducted in the educational context with children and youth (Burwell & Lenters, 2015; Dagenais et al., 2009) and by education faculty (Marshall, 2021) in diverse

locations and geographic settings to examine discursive convergence (p. 1) and trans-systemic meaning making across space, place, signs, and visual artefacts.

Understanding language in conjunction with other modalities and language learning and meaning construction as processes of resemiotization (Iedema, 2003), Lau (2020) and collaborating teachers in an English and French bilingual multiage class engaged Grades 4–6 children in a year-long inquiry into refugee experiences, discussing stories of migration through interviews with students from refugee backgrounds in both languages. Students created visual arts representations for deepened understanding and embodied reflection. Through listening to people’s lived experiences and creating aesthetic representations in playscript writing, live dramatic performances and artwork, the teachers engaged the children in TL and trans-semiotizing to promote critical practice that affected the children, fostering reflexivity and civic empathy (Mirra, 2018).

Van Viegen (2020) worked in collaboration with EAL/English for literacy development (ELD) classes at an urban elementary school, where many of the students had experienced forced displacement and migration, calling attention to not only the social, but also the material flows of activity in the children’s lives. Conducting an eco-social inquiry to understand urban and rural spaces and expand students’ linguistic and conceptual knowledge, a nearby ravine became an extension of the classroom, sparking conversations about environmental issues, including the consequences of urban development, plastic pollution, and global warming. Turning attention to cleaning up the school grounds, the teacher and students decided to create a school garden with help from their families, making a short digital film to document their work. This praxis-oriented research invited relational encounters with the environment to understand and transform conditions of experience, encompassing human and nonhuman life, tools and spaces.

Aitken and Robinson (2020) documented how Robinson as a Naskapi-Cree English Language Arts teacher decided to defy the school’s English-only policy and rethink how she could engage with her multilingual Indigenous children in their learning of English. Repositioning the children and their community’s linguistic and sociocultural resources and identities as central to meaningful learning, Robinson engaged the children in a multimodal project with affective significance, “*What makes grandparents special?*” Students used Innu, Naskapi, and English for collaborative writing as they prepared an English-Naskapi bilingual scrapbook about grandparents while connecting English learning and use to their Indigenous cultures, traditions, and activities tied to the land. Aitken and Robinson (2020, December 9) described the project as representing “converging the two rivers,” addressing the gap between the doing/being/knowing of Indigenous Peoples and those of Eurocentric ones.

To promote bilingual Inuktitut-English literacies and urban Indigeneity, researchers Patrick et al. (2013) developed a grassroots language and literacy initiative for Inuit children and their caregivers to promote interaction in English and sustained relations to homeland linguistic and cultural practices. This effort involved families in taking pictures and composing stories through a Photovoice activity, for an exploration of Inuit lifeworlds that linked both urban and Arctic spaces. A further activity was built around singing a traditional Inuktitut song and constructing a fishing rod using traditional methods. Importantly, this activity emphasized the role of an object (the fishing rod) for performing the song. Broadly, these trans-systemic meaning-making activities opened space for intergenerational sharing of Inuit experience and cultural memory, which became even more meaningful when they centred on objects as mediational tools, able to be transposed across time and space.

These studies illustrate a variety of pedagogical activities to expand communicative practices across linguistic and other semiotic resources, to re-cover, valorize, and perform their desired or imagined identities and sociocultural affiliations, and importantly, to critically wrestle with eco-sociopolitical issues as intertwined and interdependent. We recognize these efforts as teachers taking on a role of generating curriculum and building pedagogic theories through engaging in critical sociolinguistic inquiry and embodied practice with students, rather than merely delivering curriculum and implementing pedagogic strategies. This shift acknowledges and upholds teachers' expertise and contribution in producing situated, contextualized responses and approaches to language education.

Conclusions

Our proposed TL methodology in TESOL, building on insights from studies such as those described above, engages teachers and students in critical sociolinguistic inquiry and embodied practice, by opening to the assemblage of meaning in linguistic practice and beyond. Particularly, incorporating insights from new materialist and posthumanist perspectives, our conceptualization of TL methodology expands to engage the agencies and affective intensities of both human and nonhuman life, objects, and space for sustained, ethical interdependence. For TESOL educators and researchers alike, language and social interaction, while almost always primary tools for observing, documenting, and generating understanding, opening language to processes—actions, inter-actions and intra-actions between and among bodies, materials, and space—have the potential for a more encompassing vision of the wider assemblages of meaning making and ethical, critical belonging in the world. More expansive and distributed repertoires of practice have a place in classrooms, which can invigorate ways of doing, being, and knowing for the sociopolitical and ecological crises of these turbulent times.

We recognize, nonetheless, such possibilities tend to privilege those who have benefitted from the status quo and may be accustomed to the idea that change is possible. Such change has never been easy for some communities because these possibilities are compromised by deep seated structural inequities. Language teaching and teacher education cannot, therefore, be separated from broader struggles against social inequality, as evident in the recent acknowledgement and identification of mass graves of children on the sites of residential schools in Canada, bringing a renewed urgency to address the ongoing colonial legacies of oppression of minoritized languages, identities, and communities. Acknowledging a “cruel optimism” (Berlant, 2011) inherent in education, we wish to temper any claims that our proposition results in transformation on any grand scale—yet we retain radical hope (Lear, 2006), nonetheless. We are keenly aware that the insights and ideas we offer here are situated in (and limited by) our experience and understanding as well as our privilege, anchored in as they are in particular majoritized/minoritized, sociohistorical and disciplinary contexts and global locations. Reflecting on the changes in our thinking over the past 10 years, we see that this is unfinished work which will continue to grow along with other concepts and theories from different disciplines and contexts, and that must account for and address ongoing, systemic sociopolitical and ecological inequities, both now and in the future.

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