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## ***Book reviews***

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### **THE PLURILINGUAL TESOL TEACHER: THE HIDDEN LANGUAGE LIVES OF TESOL TEACHERS AND WHY THEY MATTER.**

*Elizabeth Ellis*

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A key objective of Ellis' work is to propose that the language learning experiences of TESOL teachers are both an important resource that informs their teaching, and a crucial part of their professional identity. This book represents fifteen years of research into the language learning experiences of TESOL teachers across continents, an area on which historically there has been largely silence. Global TESOL, we are reminded, has developed as a 'monolingual monolith' which has long assumed that proficiency in English is sufficient to undergo professional training, and that other languages in teachers' repertoires are less than relevant. One result of this assumption is the continuing primacy of the monolingual native-speaking teacher.

Ellis questions this view and argues for a reconceptualization of teacher language background. She argues for the term plurilingual as better conceptualising 'the complexity, unevenness and richness of teachers' language experiences and identities', rather than bilingualism or multilingualism, which are often confusingly defined; she affirms that as language learners are in the process of becoming plurilingual, they are best served by teachers who have experience of plurilingualism. Such teachers, who may or may not be native speakers of English, have undergone the processes of learning another language themselves, and they are therefore able to better articulate concrete strategies, compare lexico-grammatical structures between languages, and empathise with learners; they are also more likely to understand the frustration and ego-threatening nature of the process. Moreover, they have

insights into intercultural aspects of language learning, and crucially, they are also models for their students, representing degrees of success in language learning. The point is also made that the kinds of awareness plurilingual teachers may have are actually mandated in Australian policy documents.

After introducing the proposition that languages play a key part in the development of teachers' professional beliefs, identity, and language awareness, Ellis offers her own story and the first of several teacher vignettes which illustrate her arguments throughout the book. She then looks at language-in-education policy in Australia and other BANA contexts. The silence on teachers' language backgrounds, she points out, has been evident in teacher selection, teacher training and ongoing professional development. However, she does not take the extreme position held by Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) that monolingualism is a disadvantage or even a dysfunction- a skilled monolingual teacher would be preferable to a plurilingual teacher lacking pedagogical or reflective skills, for example. Neither does she want monolingual teachers to feel threatened by a raised awareness of the value of plurilingualism.

Central to the work are reports on three studies undertaken over several years involving 115 teachers from Australia and other countries, in which the questions were asked how varied experiences of language learning affect one's identity, beliefs and practice as an English language teacher, and what kinds of experiences are most beneficial; the findings demonstrate the powerful effects such experiences have on the formation of beliefs about language teaching and learning and teaching, and how these beliefs inform good practice. Insights gained about language teaching are also shown to be useful as a resource for systematic reflection in teacher education.

The book reviews key literature in related areas to further illuminate the data from the studies. This makes the work an excellent source book for the most current thinking within bodies of research including teacher cognition, bilingualism, culture and language teaching, and language-learner identity, as well as language awareness and language *learning* awareness. This last kind of awareness is one that is not yet widely recognised; the author has developed and used this term to refer to the understandings teachers have about the nature of learning an additional language, and it emerges as a major theme in a survey of NSW TESOL in Chapter 10.

Ellis concludes with an 'imagined future' of TESOL as a

plurilingual space, in contrast with the current proposition that TESOL sees its main focus as teaching *English* rather than teaching a second language. This work has clear implications for teacher language education and professional development, in the context of current calls for enhanced plurilingual practices in the TESOL classroom.

### **References**

Skuttnab-Kangas, T. (2000). Linguistic human rights and teachers of English. In J.K.Hall and W.g.Eggington (Eds.), *The sociopolitics of English language teaching*. 22-44. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.