


Chapter 7

Critical Emotional Reflexivity for TESOL: The What, Why, and How

Aide Chen

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2990-9475>
Western University, Canada

Julie S. Byrd Clark

Western University, Canada

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the meaning, significance, and applications of critical emotional reflexivity in order to facilitate TESOL teacher preparation. It begins with historical trends of reflexivity and emotional practices in pedagogy and research. After delving into the nuanced definitions and roles of reflexivity, the chapter presents the concept of critical emotional reflexivity and its significance in TESOL. A conceptual framework, drawing on the theories of transformative, social-emotional, and reflexive learning, is then proposed with the aim of operationalizing the integration of critical emotional reflexivity in teaching. The chapter further demonstrates how an autobiographical reflexive approach can enhance the planning and implementation of activities aimed at fostering critical emotional reflexivity among English as an additional language student teachers. This approach thus enables language teachers to critically examine emotional experiences in sociopolitical terms, offering them the possibilities for transforming both their conceptual and pedagogical practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Over sustained periods of time, research and pedagogical engagement with reflexivity in TESOL has been somewhat limited. Despite the emergence of the “reflexive turn” in social sciences approximately two decades ago (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and Canagarajah’s (1996) earlier call for TESOL practitioners to celebrate reflexivity and subjectivity through research and pedagogy, many language teacher education programs worldwide continue to reject or overlook this orientation. Instead, numerous programs operate under neoliberal agendas “in the hunt for measures, targets, benchmarks, tests, tables, audits to feed the system in the name of improvement” (Ball, 2016, p. 1046) without providing adequate empowerment for teachers to increase sensitivity to the complexity of contexts and power relations in language teaching and learning (Kumaravadivelu, 2008) or tackle those “messy but crucially important problems” (Schön, 1983, p. 43). Similarly, although some educational programs claim to foster teacher reflexivity (Belvis et al., 2013), many teacher educators predominantly approach reflexivity from a positivist manner by using a “sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions” (Brookfield, 2017, p. 3), thus being subject to “imposed singularities by discourses of modernity and Western science” (Byrd Clark, 2020, p. 88) and not necessarily helping student teachers develop critical awareness of the reflexive process. Additional criticisms also problematized certain reflective practices that are emotionally disengaging (Fook, 2010), confession-oriented (Fendler, 2003), and one-size-fits-all (Edwards & Thomas, 2010). These concerns necessitate the pressing need for TESOL practitioners to engage with reflexivity in alternative ways.

Moreover, mainstream language teacher education programs often downplay the role of emotions (e.g., Richards, 2022). This trend mirrors a long-standing practice that discourages teachers and students across disciplines and educational levels from engaging with emotional representations, experiences, and practices in the classroom. This discouragement is largely built on the misunderstood assumption that emotions, often viewed as ‘soft’, irrational, and unquantifiable, serve merely as distractions to learning (Prior, 2019; Richards, 2022). Consistent with this sentiment, within language teacher education, emotions have received significantly less research attention compared to technical aspects of teaching (Freeman, 2016; Lemarchand-Chauvin & Tardieu, 2018; Loh & Liew, 2016). Additionally, language teachers’ pedagogical practices concerning emotions have been swayed by an excessive focus on negative motions such as foreign language anxiety and their repercussions (Gkonou et al., 2017). Such training often leans towards linear and deficit approaches, overlooking the complexity and transformative potential of emotions. Only recently have TESOL researchers begun exploring emotions in more nuanced, holistic, and

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