

# Non-native English Language Teachers' Stories: Constructing Cosmopolitan Professional Identities in Australia

VicTESOL Professional Learning Seminar  
30 April 2024

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Embracing Hybrid Professional Identities: Understanding and Recognising a diverse Teaching Workforce

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# OVERVIEW

- Provocation and acknowledgment
- Background
- Problems, Aim and Questions
- Methodology
- Theoretical Frame
- Findings
- Significance and Implications
- The closing

Please note the slides are prepared with  
transculturally hybrid approach



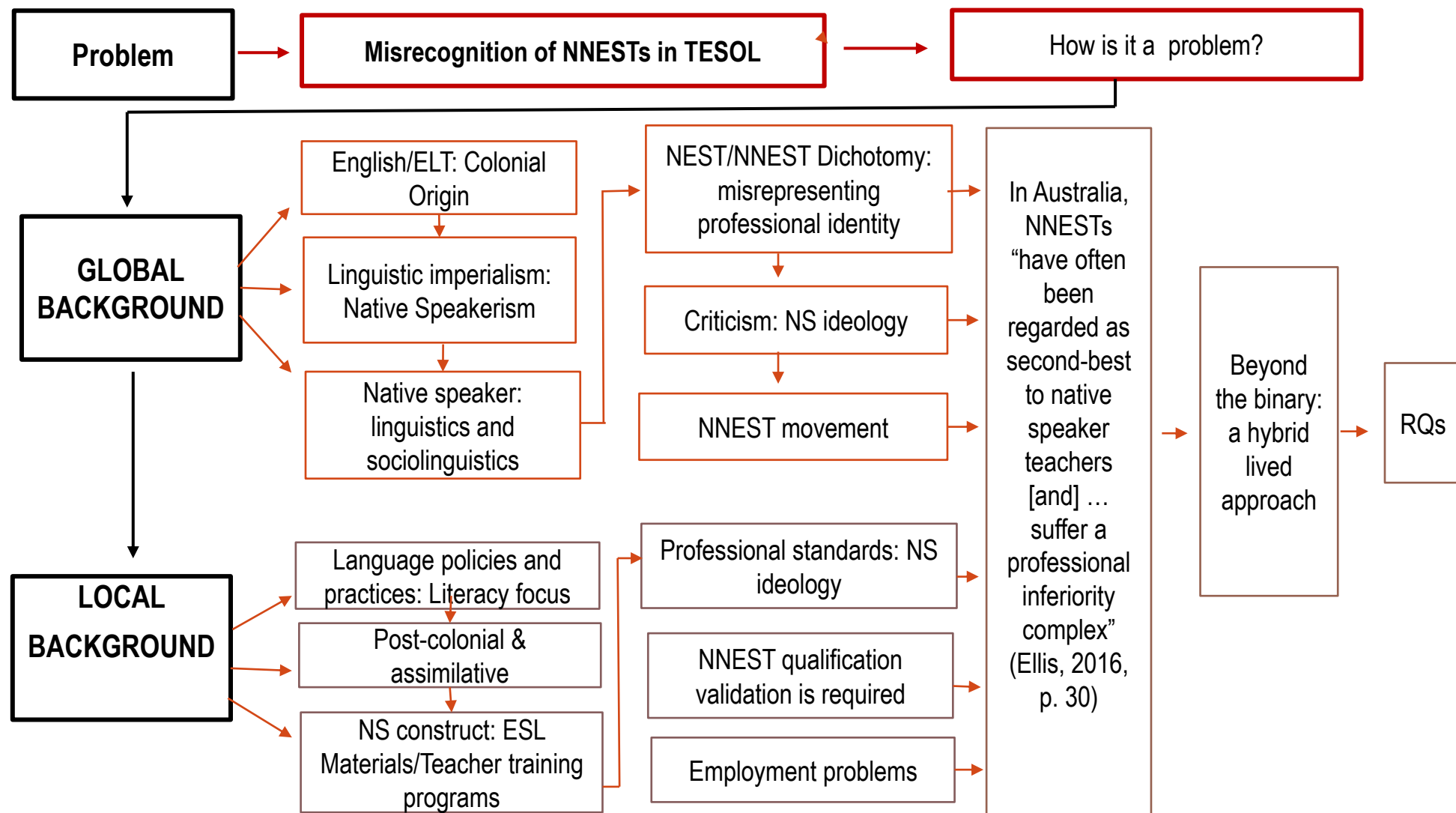
# BEYOND SELF AND THE OTHER:

- To begin, let's reflect on the moments of feeling "othered" or "privileged" based on factors like language, race, culture, gender, or intersections

Consider how you and/or others navigated these experiences and their impact on identity

Share your thoughts with us





# RESEARCH PROBLEMS, AIM AND QUESTIONS

## Problems

- **Misrecognition** of English language teachers' (ELTs') professional identity
- To date, no research has examined how language teachers form their professional identity based on their lived experiences **over time.**

## Aim

To explore how the ELT' lived experiences over time shaped their professional identity in Australian education context.

## Research Questions:

**How did the ELTs constitute their professional identity in relation to their lived experiences over time?**

a) How did the teachers initially become English language teachers?

b) How did they construct their professional identity in Australia?

c) How do they imagine their professional identity in the future?

Nigar, N., & Kostogriz, A. (2019). Deconstructing Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' Professional Identity: Looking through a Hybrid Lens. *English Language Teaching*, 12(12), 76-87.





Pseudonyms`	
Thi	Vietnam
Hien	Vietnam
Quang	Vietnam
Carlos	Brazil
Raphael	Israel/Kibbutz
Ling-ling	China
Mandy	Philippines
Frida	Philippines
Laura	Philippines
Oksana	Russia
Jasha	USSR (requested to use USSR)
Becca	Slovakia
Jigna	India
Mahati	India
Janaki	India
Natalie	Bangladesh



# PARTICIPANTS



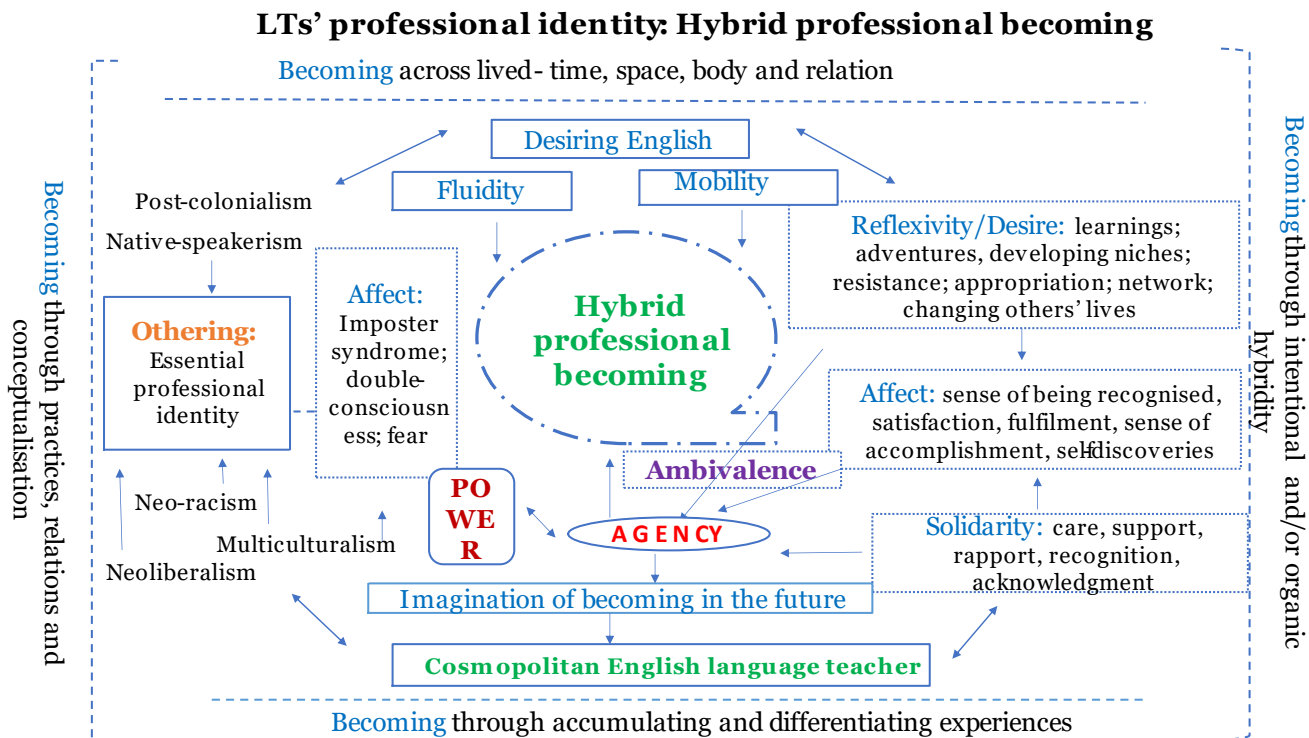
# METHODOLOGY: COMBINING HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY AND NARRATIVE INQUIRY

- The study adopted a unique research approach by combining two methodologies
- Methodologies used: Hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative inquiry
- Hermeneutic phenomenology helped in understanding the essence of teachers' experiences
- Narrative inquiry enabled the exploration of teachers' stories and perspectives
- This dual approach allowed for the generation and recursive interpretation of teachers' experiences, through both deductive and inductive approaches
- The study focuses on narrative of the lived experiences of 16 immigrant teachers, tracking their professional identity development amidst native speaker standards and their lived experiences over time

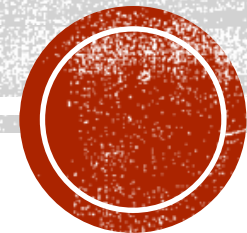
Nigar, N. (2020). Hermeneutic phenomenological narrative enquiry: A qualitative study design. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 10(1), 10-18.







# CONSTITUTING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY BASED ON LIVED EXPERIENCES OVER TIME



# RESEARCH FINDINGS

- 1. Desired Becoming:** Immigrant English language teachers' professional identity formation is shaped by the interplay of socially constructed desires and personal investments, with the concept of "desired becoming" highlighting the fusion of affective and rational elements.
- 2. "Othering" Impact:** Migration and mobility lead to the "othering" of teachers due to intersecting discourses (language, race, ethnicity, gender), causing psycho-emotional strain and hindering professional identity development.
- 3. Agency, Imagination and Hybrid Professionalism:** Teachers respond by resisting marginalization, building solidarity, and embracing hybrid professional practices, envisioning themselves as cosmopolitan professionals, with increased mobility, capable of thriving in diverse contexts.



- 1. Primacy of Affect in Decision Making:** Teachers' decisions to become an ELT were influenced by affect/desire over time
- 2. Identity Formation:** These English teachers' identities stem from their embodied experiences since early childhood
- 3. Two Becoming Paths:** Teachers' two lines of becoming intersected: as English learners and then as English teachers
- 4. Socio-cultural and Personal Drives:** The choice to become teachers was deeply intertwined with a socio-cultural aspiration towards and investment in English and English language teaching
- 5. 'Desired Becoming':** Teachers' career choices were shaped by deep-seated desire for English
- 6. Affective-Rational Dynamics:** Affect was more powerful than the act of mind in their career decisions making
- 7. Recruitment Implications:** Embracing the primacy of affective not just rational elements can aid teacher recruitment and retention and address the issue of teacher shortage

Nigar, N., Kostogriz, A. & Gurney, L. Becoming an English language teacher over lines of desire: Stories of lived experiences. *Aust. Educ. Res.* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-023-00662-4>

**BECOMING AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER OVER LINES OF DESIRE**



# ENGLISH LEARNER AND TEACHER DESIRING PRODUCTION ASSEMBLAGES

Consciously becoming an ELT

**Families:** parents, grand-parents, siblings, extended family members

**Community:** neighbours, family friends/friends, relatives

**Schools:** teachers, peers, tuition/weekend school

**Extra-curricular/leisure activities:** e.g., language games, pretend plays, memorising vocab, reading books, pretend play, writing poems, reading newspapers, debate, recitation etc.

**Higher Ed:** English language, literature, medium of study

**Cultures/pop cultures/media:** books, TV shows, music, songs, movies, games, literature

**Personal attributes:** passion for teaching and helping others with education

**Becoming and staying as a teacher:** personal and professional networks, easy employment, respect, sense of accomplishment and fulfilment

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## Assemblages of desiring production to become ELT

Unconscious social desires to learn English

Preconscious social investment to become ELT

**Native-speakerism:** sense of inferiority

Molar and molecular lines of desire



## School years

When I was in Year 7, I think, I volunteered to accompany a teacher to a bookshop ... The Picture of Dorian Gray. I asked her whether she could get an extra book for me, and she did. I consider this the beginning of MY English. This was the first time I realized that English could be alive and beautiful, that it can express feelings and send subtle messages. To this day I don't dare to re-read The Picture of Dorian Gray in fear that the magic will disappear. The experience is too precious to lose, even today. **Jasha**

### Oksana

Recalled that her parents listened to the "Beatles", and "since the time I was born, I was exposed to that music, and I fell in love with the language".

**Becca:** I've been exposed to English as long as I can remember, and I've always liked it. I liked the way it sounded, I liked its 'coolness' (it was the language of movies and songs).



**May:** I love to read and I like English, I learned to understand riddles and jokes in English. **I remember that my mother would argue and would normally say "no" to a new pair of shoes but will often buy books or comic books that are even more expensive.**

**ASSEMBLAGES OF DESIRING  
PRODUCTION TO BECOME AN ELT**

**Jigna:** ... it got me really interested into the realms of English literature. I got curious about how the people in those books lived and thought. I got more and more interested in the cultural aspects that I read about. Subsequently, English became the language of my thoughts and logic. My interest in English reflected in my academic achievements which further encouraged me to embrace English in my educational choices.



## **ASSEMBLAGES OF DESIRING PRODUCTION TO BECOME AN ELT: TERTIARY YEARS**

**Raphael:** I grew up in Kibbutz. It was a pretty close community, except for the last years of my secondary school, like the last two or three years when there were a lot of visitors coming from the United States, from the UK, to see life on the Kibbutz. So I had a few friends that came from the UK and America. And I wanted to talk to them, I wanted to, I ... am a curious person. I wanted to find out about them.

**Uni Years/Beca:** my first contact with real communication in English occurred near Birmingham [...] After that I spent another summer in New Jersey, USA when I was twenty-one [...] I think that the real break in my English studies came when I came to Australia.

## **First Employment**

**Laura** was employed in the high school division of a school she had attended and “they also got the best offer that time” for her.

## **Initial Teaching**

Thi, though initially “didn’t think much apart from the idea that this job might bring some extra allowance and would be great to catch up with Phuong more regularly at work”, found that the first few days at the language centre “changed my life forever as I felt energised working with young children and a mix of local and expatriate teachers every week”.

**Hein:** We migrated here as my husband got an offer for Ph.D. degree at the University of [Canterbury] which made him an eligible candidate for PR. **As a user and teacher of English, I had always aspired to live in a country where it is spoken ...**

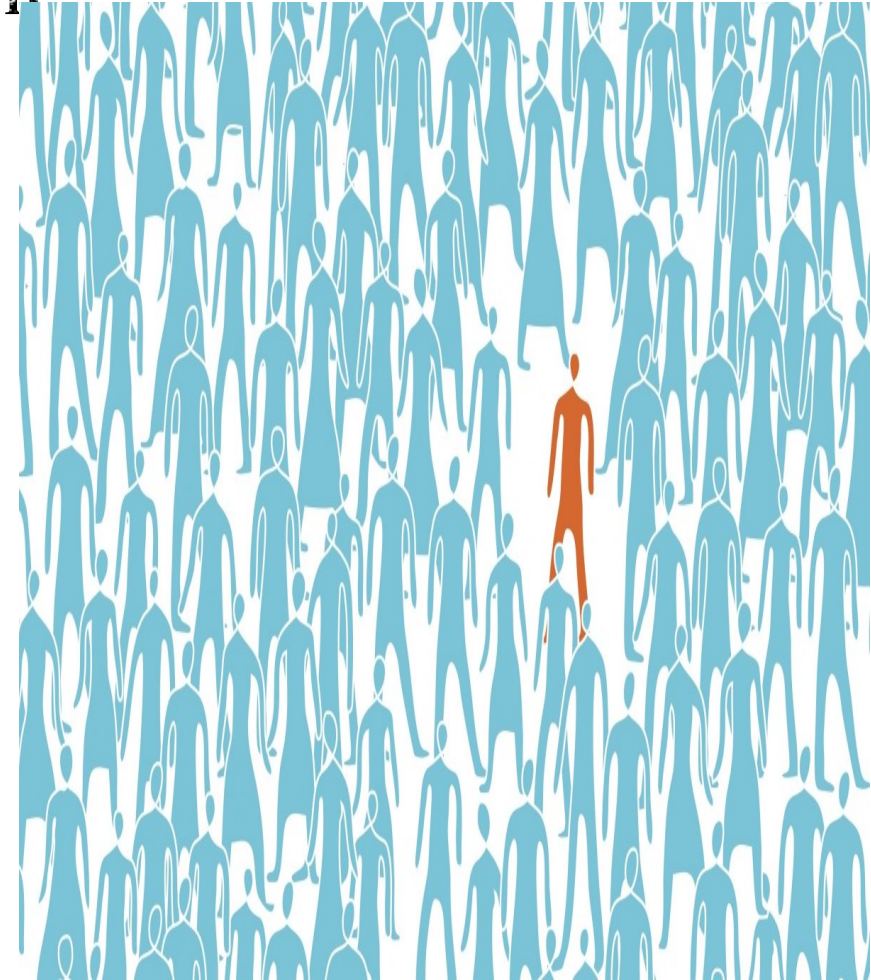


**ASSEMBLAGES OF DESIRING PRODUCTION TO BECOME ELT**

# EXPLORING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY, POWER DYNAMICS, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

1. Migration involved not just relocation but also an intricate "translation" of their identities.
2. The teachers' professional identity was impacted by the binary discourses of professionalism and the interlinked socio-historical categories and factors
3. Their professional identity was affected at intersectional and discursive levels, by the activities, interactions, and perceptions of those surrounding them
4. They were often categorised under the lens of "deficit professionals" based on factors such as race, gender, language, and culture.
5. Specific determinants that defined these socio-cultural categories include:
  - Skin colour/appearance
  - Physical appearance
  - Gender identity
  - Status as international students, migrants, or immigrants
  - Nuances in spoken English and accent
  - Place of origin
  - English language test scores
  - Their qualifications and experience
6. Teachers exhibited reflexivity and developed agency practices propelling to hybrid professional imagination

Nigar, N., Kostogriz, A., Gruney, L., & Janfada, M. (2023 ). "No one would give me that job in Australia": When professional identities intersect with how teachers look, speak and where they come from *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 44(5), 1-18.






## **BINARY LOGIC: NATIVE SPEAKERISM/POST-COLONIALISM DETERMINING NNESTS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN AUSTRALIA?**

Settlement: **Mahati's** initial work in a Sri Lankan grocery still haunts like her a nightmare, "... (cooking, cleaning, packing, selling, etc. – the worst time of my life!)”.

**Raphael:** In those days, I wanted a job. It didn't matter what job I did. ... I've never found it hard to get a job, but I was willing to do some very, very low paid work. I was studying and playing music, make a living. I was a taxi driver for 10 years.

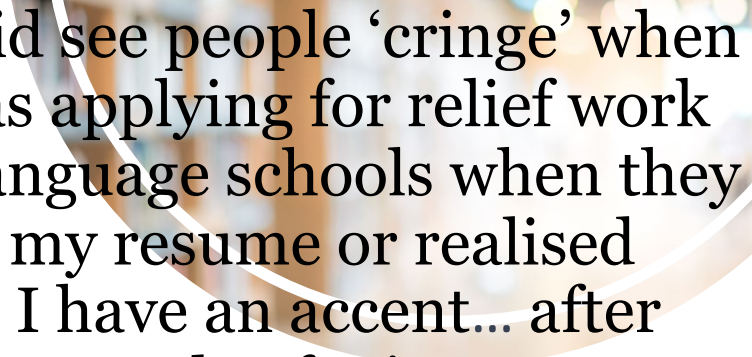


Pre-/during migration: I took the IELTS test (one of the many requirements for a Secondary Teacher) four times. I applied for reassessment of the result of the fourth take. It was the most difficult part (**Laura**).

**May:** “it’s not like I apply ... and I get a teaching job ..., I have to go way below my skills and ability ... to be able to get where I am now”.

**You're dreaming to teach English in Australia.**  
**Natalie**





▪ I did see people ‘cringe’ when I was applying for relief work at language schools when they saw my resume or realised that I have an accent... after just a couple of minutes came ‘unfortunately, the position has been filled’. **Jasha**

When I first arrived in Australia, **no one would give me the job as an English teacher** as I came from Vietnam where English is a foreign language. **Hien**

▪ I began as a casual Relief Teacher, interviewed for a public-school teaching position but was rejected due to lack of experience. I also had a telephonic interview with [Serco], but they cited my lack of Australian experience. So, I took a job in an after-school program, utilizing my VIT license, but it wasn't a teaching career. ... It was far from a teaching career. **Jigna**

... I didn't get a single response. Not even a call for an interview! I was told (by other family friends) to go to Centrelink and tell them that I needed a job and help with my resume. **Mahati**

## **EXPERIENCES OF HIRING DISCRIMINATIONS**



# BINARY VIEWS WHILE IN PRACTICE

- I was passing by in the corridor when the coordinator introduced me to the new student. The student did not even make eye contact – she just turned around to the coordinator and said – “No Aussie teacher.....? I like only Aussie.” I was very sad. At another time it has happened in class when a student ... has asked to be moved to another class because she wanted to learn “Australian English.” My heart aches even today. From that very time, I felt I had to prove to the students that a good teacher need not have white skin and an Australian accent. **Mahati**
- In the staffroom, I have always been viewed, talked to and judged based on my background. People will comment on my accent, laugh at my pronunciation mistakes, ask me why Putin does this and that, or ask me if I am a heavy vodka drinker - every possible insult or prejudice or the most ridiculous comment or question you can possibly imagine. **Oksana**



I have to prove that I'm at par with the other teachers in my content knowledge and in my delivery, or maybe better for that matter. And then they will think that she is worth teaching. She's worth listening to. ...it is heart-breaking... you're prejudiced against because you're non-native and they think that you don't know English well. **Jigna**

”

## BINARY VIEWS IN INSTITUTIONS

- “I’ve been praised for speaking English so well not being an Australian. Most of the time, I take it as a compliment, but then ‘I can speak English too’.” **Quang**
- A colleague said in general, “Oh, if you have an accent, you shouldn’t teach English because it doesn’t present proper model of spoken language”. **Raphael**
- I would always be a second choice or in some cases lack of choice when they have nobody available. **Jigna**
- One of the managers introduced Quang “as a Vietnamese guy to teach English to his other employees. Everyone just laughed because it’s so strange!” **Quang**
- However, I often feel confused and isolated in the secondary school, as I’m not a ‘proper’ English teacher, nor a language teacher. **Ling Ling**
- My use of vocabulary, pronunciation and intonation would always be corrected by my colleagues, such as the uses of sofa, tiffin box instead of couch and lunch box. **Natalie**



## PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES: IMPOSTER SYNDROME

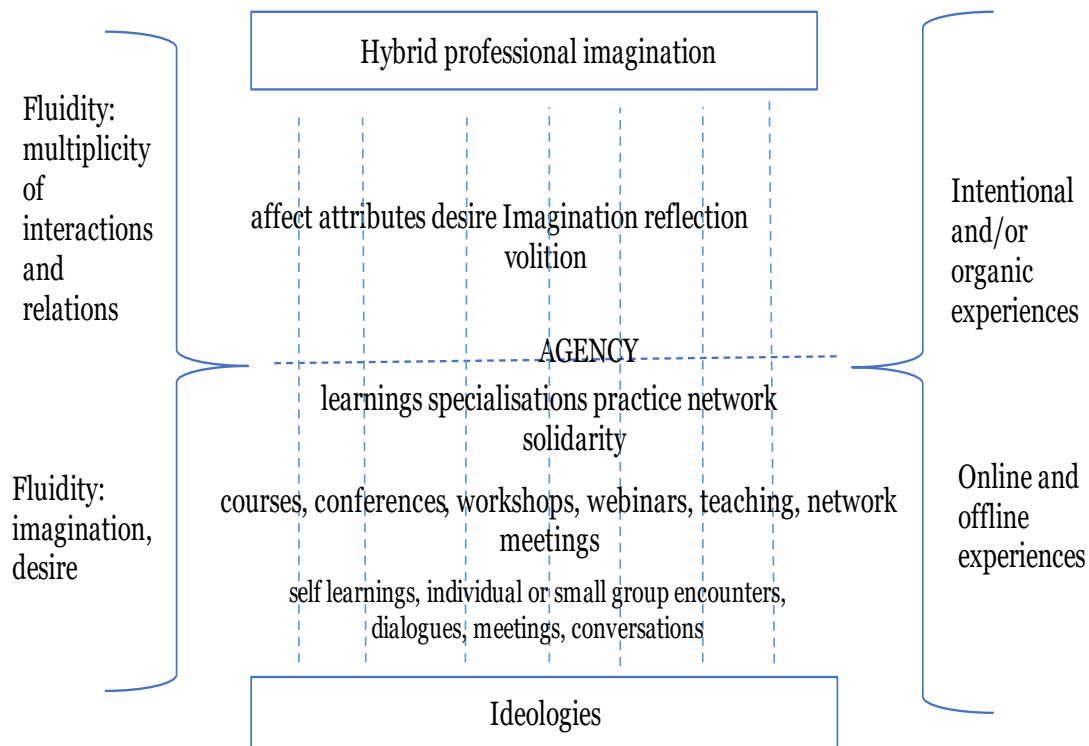
**Fear/self-othering:** “I feel intimidated again because I’m not local, I’m not a native English speaker.” (Laura)

I was terrified of having to teach English. **Becca**

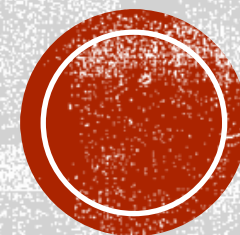
**Fear/self-consciousness:** Mahati “was mortified by the fact that here I was an Indian (with an Indian accent) teaching English to native speakers (I was teaching Year 7 and Year 9 students)”.

**Frida:** I’m not a prominent-looking person, nor am I super-outgoing and bubbly. I am on the short side at only 155cm. I also look very Asian.

**Carlos:** I thought I could be too pretentious to teach English in a country where the official language is English and I was not even born here.



# IMAGINING FUTURE IDENTITY AS COSMOPOLITAN TEACHERS OF ENGLISH



**Self-discovery/affect/agency:** For more than one year I have been teaching EAP, which I find pleasant and enriching as a teacher, but also challenging, making me reflect on my work, my strengths, and weaknesses, as well as my empathy as a teacher. (Carlos)

**Reflexivity/hybridity:** ... at that moment a lightbulb went off in my head. It was a teaching epiphany. ... After that I started being more creative in my lesson planning. (Becca)

**Developed niche:** “I played meditative / instrumental music when the students enter the class in the morning or when they’re engaged in a writing activity. At the end of the session, we always play and sing together some fun songs from ... I also incorporate the use of technology in many activities, so students are more involved. (Mahati)

**Resistance/agency:** “if your speech is clear and understood by the students, then it doesn't matter what accent you have”. (Raphael)

**Reflexivity/hybridity:** Initially when students ... would ask the Aussie tutor the pronunciation of a word or ask the tutor to read a story, I would be embarrassed. However, now I ask the tutor to read - as a model for the students. I also tell the students that they should listen to different accents. (Mahati)

## FUTURE PROFESSIONAL PERSONA AS “HYBRID PROFESSIONALS” INFLUENCED BY THEIR PRESENT EXPERIENCES

- **Hybridity:** ... it’s a mix of my education, teacher training, my workplace (colleagues and students) and, of course, the conferences I attend. And lately social media ... especially Facebook Groups have had a great impact on me. I’ve learnt so much from the groups. ... conferences, workshops, webinars. (Mahati)



# FUTURE PROFESSIONAL PERSONA AS “HYBRID PROFESSIONALS” INFLUENCED BY THEIR PRESENT EXPERIENCES

## The Mimic Man: The Power of Hybridity

- They're threatened by me. I am the one who organises the harmony day at our centre, the planner week, the refugee day. ... All seven days we have different activities. And I coordinated all of that. So, it does take a lot of hard work. ....
- They're threatened by me. They think, where does she get this time? She's here the whole day, what does she want to prove? Why does she want to do with this? Why not leave it alone? **She has a big head.** She's also said that to me.
- ... not once, not twice I've had her remarks three times. "My God, you Indians, you very smart. You just want to go go go ... (Mahati)





## FUTURE PROFESSIONAL PERSONA AS “HYBRID PROFESSIONALS” INFLUENCED BY THEIR PRESENT EXPERIENCES

- **Satisfaction/recognition:** It felt “good to be praised and commended for doing a good job”. **Frida**

**Solidarity/Affect: Mahati’s** ... agency proliferated as the “coordinator taught” her “everything about the AMEP program and **answered all my questions** always very politely. ... She was very **warm and very professional**. She **gave me more responsibilities** because she believed in my hard work and ... capabilities”.

**Solidarity: Jigna** was “fortunate” enough to “have **trail blazing mentors and colleagues**” who “**took time out and allowed**” her to “observe their lessons, sit down with” her and discuss possible resources, explain the curriculum to” her and “best of all narrate their personal challenges to me”.

**Solidarity/Affect: Laura** acknowledged that “being surrounded by my **supportive and appreciative colleagues**, coordinators and managers has greatly influenced my work practice. They shaped me to be confident in teaching, as well as mentoring me to be a better trainer/teacher to students”.



# IMAGINATION AS A COSMOPOLITAN TEACHER OF ENGLISH BEYOND TEACHING ENGLISH

- I want to explore other avenues of teaching, perhaps cultural training to people in the other sector. In my role as a Program Leader, I have come across people working in other organisations who are quite unaware of what it means to be a refugee and how it that different to being a migrant. **Janaki**
- Even in the AMEP program, the students need to be motivated. At present some of them are so depressed and the pressure of learning English, finding a job, settling their family is terribly affecting their health. There are organisations out there who have got resources to help the newly arrived refugees, but it is a matter of tapping into them. I can see myself exploring those resources and helping students learn English in a less stressful manner. **Janaki**



**Cosmopolitan English teacher:** As for Englishes, while 'local' component is important, I tend to focus much less on it when teaching ELICOS students located offshore: they don't need survival skills in Australia. I am aware of the 'Englishes' of the world, and always stress that often it's the usage in different parts of the world, rather than what a grammar book says. (Jasha)

**Covid-19:** Unfortunately, I am not teaching English now. Online teaching had trickled down to one, then nothing by mid-2020. ... I have, however, committed to moving to Europe next year to teach English. (Frida)

**English as a lingua franca teacher:** English cannot simply be defined by terms such as American, British, or even Australian English. To believe that there is a specific register of English that everyone should speak and write in is troublesome, as it alienates speakers in countries where English was adopted, but nevertheless use it on a daily basis. It also misleads people to believe that, for instance, people living in the UK only speak the Queen's English and so on. Therefore, my aim in teaching students has now focussed on being comprehensible, rather than striving for 'nativeness'. (Quang)

## IMAGINATION OF HYBRID PROFESSIONAL BECOMING

- **Global English teacher:** I see myself as if I could be a global English teacher because English does not ... belong to one culture. It doesn't belong to Australians; it doesn't really belong to one country.... (Jigna)

**Plurilingual English teacher:** By being bilingual, I'd like people to see it as an advantage; in fact, it should be acknowledged as an advantage. The language learning journey of a bilingual is far more complicated and intellectually difficult compared to that of a monolingual. Therefore, I take pride in my linguistic capacity of learning English independently and to be able to teach English with high efficiency and skill is a great gift. (Thi)



# AMBIVALENCE: A COSMOPOLITAN TEACHER BUT AN NNEST

- I no longer see the need to define myself as anyone other than an English teacher. ... I can comfortably call myself as an English teacher with no other tag attached to it. ...I have taught in this area [TAFE] for some time and my experience is limited so cannot comment on how I would tag myself if I were to work in a different educational setting. **Janaki**
- I imagine still being a global language teacher. I have always been a fan of world Englishes. I respect each language but love English as a universal language connecting every individual. ... I will always consider myself as a non-native, striving to improve and be better. **Laura**



# NOW WHAT: HYBRID PROFESSIONAL BECOMING? PRACTICE, POLICY, RESEARCH, TEACHER EDUCATION

## Transcending Binary Logic

- Emphasises the transformative roles of desire, critical self-reflection, agency, solidarity, and imagination in becoming cosmopolitan English teachers
- Challenges conventional classifications in education

## Promoting Diversity

- Encourages diversity and a global educational ethos
- Advocates for inclusivity in English language teaching

## Paradigm Shift

- Calls for a paradigm shift in acknowledging migrant English teachers' identities
- Addresses English learners' needs, teacher shortages, and workforce diversification



# NOW WHAT: HYBRID PROFESSIONAL BECOMING? PRACTICE, POLICY, RESEARCH, TEACHER EDUCATION

- **Reshaping the Profession**

- "Hybrid professional becoming" offers a new perspective.
- Has the potential to reshape the English teaching profession for English education as multilingual subject.

- **Setting a Benchmark**

- Provides a benchmark for research and practice in teacher education.
- Offers insights for educators, curriculum, and policymakers.

- **Culturally Responsive Approach**

- Urges educational stakeholders to collaborate.
- Emphasizes the importance of a culturally responsive approach in appreciating immigrant English language teachers' professional identities, both in Australia and worldwide.



# **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND MEDIA ATTENTION**

- Wrote several blogs and articles for media and professional organisations locally and globally
- Collaborated with teachers across Australian, national and international intra- and inter-university media teams and academics
- Presented at conferences and invited talks





# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND MEDIA ATTENTION

Educenter

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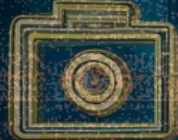
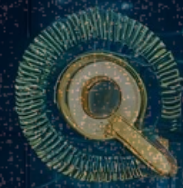
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# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND MEDIA ATTENTION

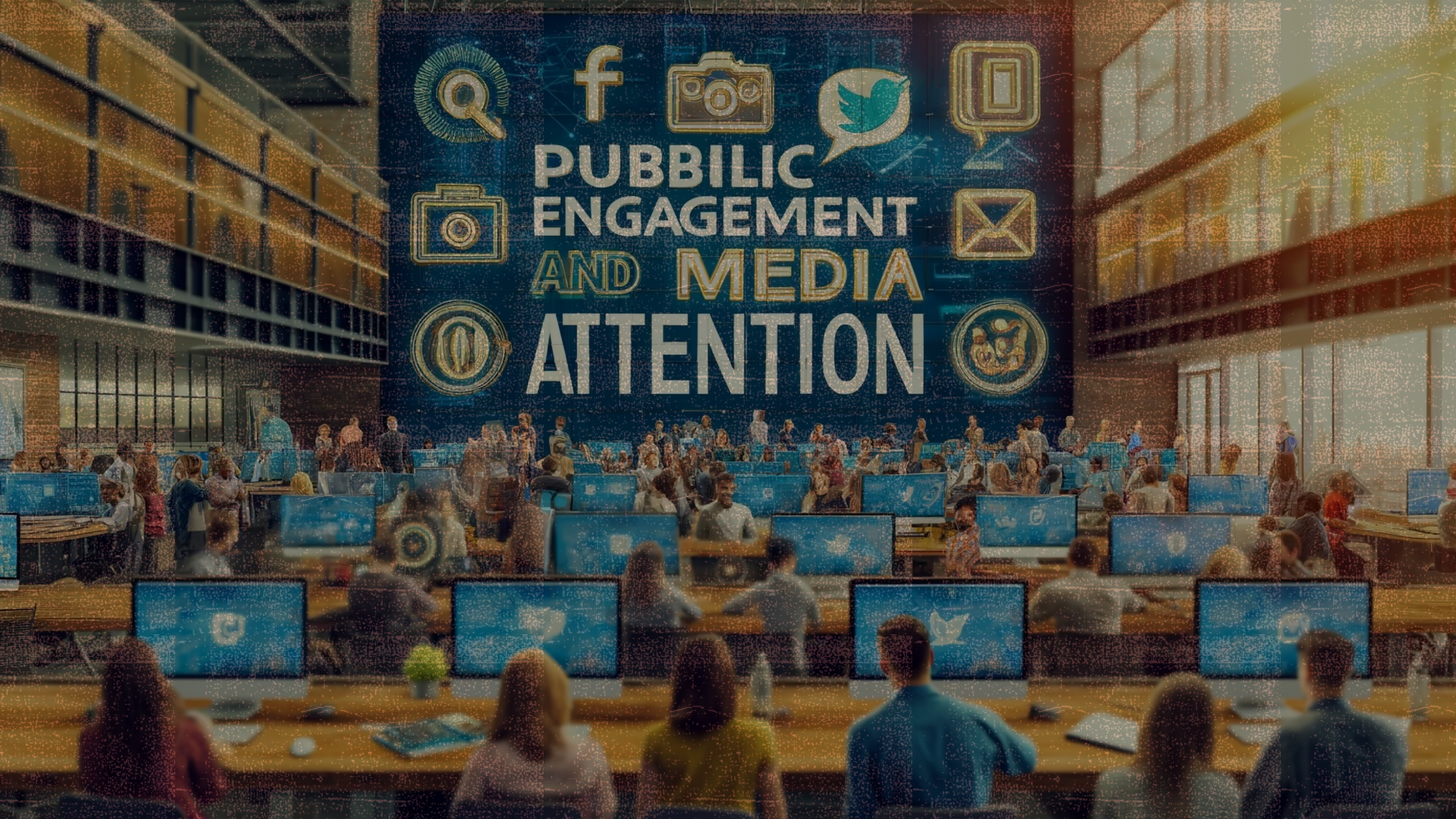




**PUBBILIC  
ENGAGEMENT  
AND MEDIA**



**ATTENTION**



# POLICY CHANGE FROM THE RESEARCH, PUBLICATIONS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

## English language proficiency tests exemptions at NESA

- NESA may grant you an exemption from having to pass an ELPT test if you can provide appropriate and verified evidence that addresses **at least two of the following criteria**:
  - teaching experience in the English language
  - evidence of employment in an occupation, other than teaching requiring effective English written and oral communication
  - evidence of undertaking all secondary schooling in Australia or another country where English is the main, official language
  - evidence of teacher registration or licencing in a country where English is the main, official language and where English language proficiency was a condition of that registration or licencing, or
  - the successful completion of further tertiary study undertaken in Australia or another country where English is the main, official language.
- Exemptions are not automatic.
- A NESA assessment officer will first assess your qualification(s) for eligibility for accreditation. If your qualification(s) are eligible, you can then request an ELPT exemption if you meet at least 2 of the exemption criteria.
- NESA will assess your evidence provided and let you know the outcome. (NESA, 2024)





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Racism is a disease in society. We're all equal. I don't care what their color is, or religion. Just as long as they're human beings they're my buddies". – **Mandawuy Yunupingu** (Indigenous musician and educator)

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Our spirituality is a oneness and an interconnectedness with all that lives and breathes, even with all that does not live or breathe." – **Mudrooroo** (Indigenous novelist & poet)



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