

Responding to Alison Phipps' 'Gifts are in the feet'

Thank you for such a thoughtful and inspiring presentation. These are difficult times for language education and your talk has illuminated for us both the source of the problem we face and the fundamental reorientation needed if we are to move forward.

Your critical stance recognises the political nature of language and language learning and the monolingual discourse which still all too often informs official policy and shapes the way we see ourselves. This handicaps our ability to understand the world, to listen to and learn from the other and to realise our potential as multicompetent speakers. It has justified the denial of linguistic rights by multiple means not least by making people ashamed of their first languages, something I have witnessed at first hand in our schools over many years.

You invite us to embark on a 'decolonising journey inwards', to recognise different ways of knowing including the poetic and to live what we believe in whatever context we may find ourselves. Your humanistic stance encourages us to view language learning as a translingual/transcultural enterprise, as a sharing of perspectives and stories, as a dynamic and at times unsettling process of identity negotiation and personal growth. It prioritises notions of exchange, collaboration, playfulness, caring and respect. It is fundamentally democratic, challenges elitist views of culture, exposes the exclusive practices of academia, values an aesthetic/poetic sensibility and seeks to build human and social capital.

With regard to turning this vision into reality, you tell us that it's going to be messy, that we must begin with questions and self-questioning ('puzzlement'), that we must make space for alternative voices. More concretely, what seems to emerge is the importance of positioning language learning within a broader literacy or Multiliteracies frame grounded in intercultural exploration and fostering multisensory and aesthetic as well as linguistic ways of knowing. It invokes 'thinking with the gifts of the feet'. In these challenging times, the prospect you have opened up for us is principled, exciting and attuned to the experience and needs of citizens in the modern world.