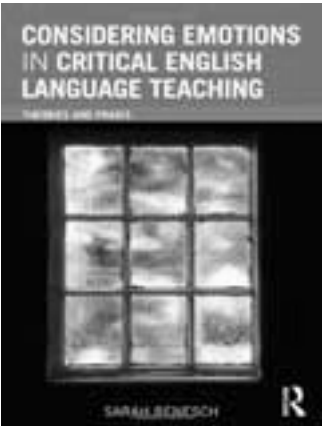


## Considering Emotions in Critical English Language Teaching: Theories and Praxis

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Considering Emotions in Critical English Language Teaching: Theories and Praxis		
<b>Author:</b>	Sarah Benesch (2012)	
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Sarah Benesch, known to many as the author of *Critical English for Academic Purposes* (2001), is a prominent TESOL scholar and activist. Her newest book, *Considering Emotions in Critical ELT*, is certainly no disappointment in its innovation and relevance to the field of second language teaching. Relying on feminist/critical theory frameworks, Benesch explores the role of immigrant students' and their teachers' emotions in college instruction and identifies literacy and identity issues faced by English language learners via reading, writing, and speaking/discussion activities. Benesch attempts to answer three questions in her book: How have emotions and affect been theorized?; How might these theories of emotion be applied to research in critical ELT?; and, How might attention to emotion enhance English teaching and learning?

Each chapter prefaces the content to follow, guiding the reader from theory to practical application. Benesch addresses her first research question of how emotions and affect have been theorized in Chapters 1-3 and accounts for her third research question, i.e., that emphasizing that attention to emotions will not revolutionize critical theory in ELT, but will lead to small subtle shifts that cumulatively might lead to social reform (p. 134). Addressing her second research question, each chapter concludes with observations on how critical emotional theory applies to ELT.

In Chapter 1, Benesch introduces her rationale for considering emotions in critical ELT and provides a rationale for the book. She briefly highlights two perspectives that she further develops in the next two chapters: affect and cognition in mainstream ELT literature, and emotion and criticality in critical ELT literature. The last section of Chapter 1 is devoted to a very powerful reflexive exercise whereby Benesch writes about her social/emotional history. She uses feminist scholar Sara Ahmed's concept of "how we feel" to explore how her own interest in critical teaching developed over time—identifying the social unrest of the 1960s as a critical training ground for her eventual move toward critical/emotional teaching.

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of how Benesch's work departs from four approaches outlined in the research on emotions in ELT—cognitive (Jane Arnold, John Schumann, Rebecca Oxford, Zoltan Dörnyei), sociocultural (Paula Golembek, Karen Johnson, Donald Freeman), multidisciplinary (Aneta Pavlenko), and embodied self (Claire Kramersch). Here Benesch also sets the stage for critical applied linguistics and application of critical theorizing of emotions/affect (used interchangeably) in ELT. An exploration of how affect and emotions are theorized from various fields such as sociology, geography, political theory, and anthropology comprises the bulk of Chapter 3. Benesch explores how affect and emotions are theorized in critical theory, including the influence of Baruch Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze, and looks at Ahmed's feminist scholarship on emotions. As an example of Deleuze's influence on her work, Chapter 5 revisits lessons on military recruitment that rely on a Deleuzian framework. In her discussion of pedagogies of affect (i.e. that disrupt/suspend the teacher/student binary), Benesch considers 'pedagogy of friendship' and writes about an out-of-class experience with a student where she transcended her teacher identity to take on the role of a counter-recruiter. She ultimately comes to the conclusion that critical ELT must, in the name of deeper embodied engagement, pay attention to affect and friendship as a means of unsettling binaries (p. 92).

Chapter 4 is an exploration of Ahmed's notion of "sticky objects"—objects to which emotions adhere. Benesch uses data drawn from teachers' and students' reactions to dictionaries and cellphones and discusses the implications of teachers' and students' different reactions. Apart from dictionaries and cellphones as sticky objects, I found Benesch's use of Stephanie Vandrick's (2009) discussion of "Tea and TESOL" to be a particularly poignant example of feminist theory applied to ELT (p. 59). Vandrick writes about her experience with tea and teacups as both positive sticky objects and oppressive sticky objects—positive due to her associations with women around the world gathering together over tea to discuss interests and concerns, evoking mother-daughter relationships and happy memories of childhood; oppressive because tea and teacups are symbols of privilege, luxury, and tea plantations.

Chapter 6 describes Benesch's use of two assignments using Kramersch's notion of embodied selves in two foreign language contexts: in an undergraduate language acquisition course, and in an ESL reading course. This chapter suggests ways to introducing emotions to language students beyond simply reproducing the status quo. To elicit embodied emotions, Benesch asked her students to come up with metaphors for

second language acquisition (SLA) such as “Writing English is like trying to paint a picture with the wrong colors,” (p. 103) or “Speaking this language [English] is like being full before dessert,” (p. 103). Chapter 7 takes on Hirschfeld’s (1979) research, the work of writing program administrators (WPA), and Zembylas’ (2005) emotion work on early childhood science teachers. With data drawn from interviews with eight teachers, this chapter also outlines various types of emotion work that teachers engage in—embodied work, emotion management, and explicitly teaching emotions.

As a professor in the City University of New York (CUNY) system, Benesch often teaches immigrant ESL students. Much of her work is informed by this in-the-classroom experience. While some may find her anti-war/anti-neoliberalism orientation intrusive, the book’s content (theory and praxis) as it relates to the field of ELT and critical pedagogy is invaluable. Moreover, her critical stance was reflexively accounted for in a very powerful opening chapter. In the introduction, where Benesch writes about her social/emotional journey, she candidly admits that this book could not have been written earlier in her career as she was not yet ready to examine the relationship between emotions and critical ELT (p. 3).

Overall, this book is informative in its broad survey of multiple theoretical and philosophical perspectives on emotion and affect, while at the same time inspiring in its empirical research examples (Chapters 4-7). Most impactful, beyond its methodological effectiveness, Benesch’s examples of her own research can be replicated by other second language teachers in their own classrooms as a means of developing their own critical lens in ELT.

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