Series Editors' Preface

It is a great pleasure to welcome Yasuko Kanno's new book to the Critical Language and Literacies Studies (CLLS) series. As series editors, the addition of this important work also provides an opportunity to pause and reflect on a series that began in 2009 and now includes 27 publications from around the world, each engaged with particular problems, settings and configurations of language and power, some closely linked to identities and their varied intersectionalities, with others more local and community-based than national and global in perspective. In our own writing, each of us has had recent opportunities to explore what is of central concern for the series – the meanings and purposes of criticality in language studies (e.g. Chun & Morgan, 2019; Kubota & Miller, 2017; Pennycook, 2021). Certainly, definitions and priorities have changed over time, in part, reflecting new understandings of inequity and oppression arising from increased dialogue with those historically excluded from privileged domains of knowledge production. The paradigmatic pendulum for critical work has also swung in insightful directions – in some cases, more structural and deterministic, while in others, more constructivist and agentive. Definitional and functional boundaries around texts and literacy practices have also expanded, integrating more trans-semiotic, multimodal, embodied and affective components in meaning making analyses. Innovative, transdisciplinary thinking arising from engagement with indigeneity, ecology, post-humanism and post/decolonial perspectives have also helped refocus and reinvigorate our understanding of criticality for the 21st century. Looking back, the CLLS series, as a whole, has been at the forefront of these developments.

In a chapter titled 'Regrounding Critical Literacy', Allan Luke (2014) observed that 'unpacking the relationship between discourse representation and reality remains *the* core question of critical literacy as theory and practice' (2014: 146). Kanno's innovative contribution addresses

this core question in exemplary fashion. The reality she unpacks is the persistent marginalization of English Learners (ELs) in US high schools, and their systemic exclusion from postsecondary education (PSE) and the improved life chances it could provide at-risk students. The specific discourse representation she implicates in this marginalization is the pervasive deficit orientation underpinning curricula, school-based language policies, and interpersonal relationships between teachers, counselors and ELs at the high school she researched. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (1977, 1986; see also Wacquant, 2016), at both the individual and institutional level, is prominent in framing the mediation between structure and agency and the interaction between macro and micro factors involved in Brighton High School (pseudonym). Kanno defines a school's institutional habitus as its 'collective beliefs about what its students are capable of, what is within their reach, and what they deserve. Such institutional habitus in turn guides the school's policies, practices, and expectations for its students'. EL students, within this institutional orbit, come to accept and internalize the low expectations communicated to them. EL students with the academic ability to succeed in four-year degree programs, for example, come to doubt their ability to do so, enrolling in a local two-year community college program, instead. Still, the formation of an individual habitus does not lend itself to causally direct outcomes or easily predictive trajectories, a key strength of Bourdieu's theory and one that is illuminated by Kanno's research methodology, which details the life stories and school experiences of each of her seven EL participants at Brighton.

This book is clearly not a testament to social reproduction or a coordinated grand design for molding obedient and hard-working citizens through education. Indeed, Kanno reveals a litany of mismanagement and haphazard decision-making at Brighton, which is memorably illustrated by way of a quote from Harklau (2016) worth repeating: 'These mistakes have less in common with sociological visions of inexorable institutional social reproduction and more in common with Kafkaesque visions of random bureaucratic dysfunction' (2016: 602). Predictably, this habitus of dysfunction is most harmful for students (i.e. ELs, racialized, ethno-linguistic minorities) lacking the kinds of social and linguistic capital most valued by the school and broader society. Most disappointing is the individual habitus of many teachers and staff, who are quick to blame EL shortcomings (linguistic, familial) for the academic underachievement witnessed. As Kanno shows, these teachers and staff believe they are acting in the best interests of EL students by protecting them from the inevitable disappointment of failure. The effect,

however, is the withholding of the kinds of appropriate and challenging academic content that would adequately prepare ELs for either PSE or meaningful career prospects beyond high school.

Kanno's research approach may be strategically effective in another important way. Arguably, by providing intimate portraits of participants (i.e. teachers, counselors and students) and the reasons for the misguided or counter-productive decisions they come to make, readers can potentially identify and empathize with the barriers ELs face in ways that mobilize local stakeholders to action and in ways unmet by abstract theoretical discussions or macro-educational studies. The transformative potential of life stories and narratives align with the attention they give to the idiosyncrasies of power locally experienced by social actors. Such stories add a necessary degree of complexity and caution in response to over-generalized analyses and the simplistic solutions they generate. In the sociology of education, one is reminded of classic school-based ethnographies such as Paul Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour* or Peter McLaren's (1989) *Life in Schools*, both of which take a more deterministic perspective on social reproduction and the inevitable cooptation of student resistance. Kanno's approach is a more nuanced, bottom-up perspective on macro discourses and processes, which other CLLS authors have productively explored. Beatriz Lorente (2018), for example, effectively utilizes interview data of Filipina domestic workers to illuminate the precarious conditions of transnational domestic labourers and the English scripts of servitude articulated by these vulnerable workers. Bill Johnston's (2017) study of English teaching in an Evangelical school in Poland draws upon the voices of students and teachers to problematize narrow proclamations regarding the ethical and professional parameters of such work. The transformative potential of and through interview data is perhaps most evident in Christian Chun's (2015) study, in which his ongoing conversations with Emilia, the EAP classroom teacher, serve to revise course materials and interactions in ways that challenge dominant neoliberal discourses on economic globalization.

Kanno's study makes other innovative contributions to the CLLS series. For one, it is the first extensive focus on EL students in a high school in the USA, a major migrant receiving country, in which policymakers struggle over the provision of education for voluntary and involuntary newcomers, including those categorized as undocumented and potentially subject to forced repatriation. Situated in the US, Kanno's study exposes ingrained disparities (e.g. inaccessible tuition fees in esteemed private colleges and university) and a system of complicated admissions procedures, SAT tests and timelines that appear inscrutable

to ELs who might dream of accessing a four-year college and university degree programs. Kanno also draws attention to stubborn monoglossic language ideologies and policies in the US that favour English and devalue the rich bi/multilingual repertoires of ELs. She has also undertaken one of the most elaborated applications of Bourdieu's theory of habitus in the series, though Inge Kral's (2012) ethnographic study of Ngaanyatjarra literacy practices in contact with the Australian English-medium schools warrants important mention. Bourdieu's work on the various forms of capital (symbolic, social, cultural) also features prominently in Andrea Sterzuk's (2011) study of Indigenized Englishes in Saskatchewan schools. Though not labelled as such, the individual habitus of white settler teachers in Sterzuk's interview data reveals a similar pattern of low expectations and racial/cultural mismatch that are causally implicated in the relative high rate of school failure for Indigenous children.

Of note, Kanno begins her book preface by acknowledging the timing of its publication during COVID-19, pointing out how the pandemic has served to expose and further exacerbate existing inequities in the US education system for vulnerable populations such as English language learners (ELs). For critical researchers and educators, it is worth reflecting on what Kanno's observation reveals about language and power, as well as emergent opportunities for critical work in times of crisis. As Kanno has persuasively argued, labels such as EL arbitrarily attach students to a system of lowered expectations that limit their possibilities for PSE. These labels become self-actualizing, as students begin to internalize and perform the underachievement that these stigmatizing labels assign to them. Despite evidence to the contrary, the institutional habitus of schools in liberal democratic societies leads towards denial of complicity or responsibility. Instead, decision makers give voice to the meritocratic ideals of the nation-state, proclaiming the promise of social mobility and greater equity for ELs, racialized and socioeconomically challenged students through education.

Alternatively, educational discourses stress the importance of the work of individual teachers or counselors, exceptional actors who can make a difference for some students. As Kanno makes clear, however, while the hard work and dedication of such people should be acknowledged, solutions based on individualistic enterprise miss the point that these are systemic and multi-dimensional concerns. The promise of social mobility is unattainable for most, given the systemic barriers involved, though this doesn't seem to deter the misleading optimism of public and school officials. A good example of this public deceit or denial comes from Harklau's (2000) study, in which four high school, Latina ELs are

publicly praised as 'an inspiration for everyone' (Harklau, 2000: 46; cited in Kanno, this volume) yet later positioned as the worst kinds of students at the two-year community college they subsequently attended. We are reminded here of the double-edged effects of the racialized invocations of speaking 'good' or even 'perfect' English (Alim & Smitherman, 2020).

In the context of the pandemic, such hollow proclamations of EL inspiration can be seen as closely parallel to those currently received by another highly visible at-risk group, the so-called 'frontline workers', many of whom work in COVID 'hot zones' with inadequate and unregulated safety provisions, some living in overcrowded spaces (e.g. migrant farm workers), and almost all earning low wages that contradict the public gratitude routinely expressed for 'our heroes'. The pandemic has indeed served to expose the racialized, gendered, and class/poverty-based inequities involved. And as Kanno's comprehensive study shows, ELs are a disproportionate part of this vulnerable precariat given their lack of high school preparation for either PSE or technical careers that require advanced training. School participation by ELs during the pandemic dropped more significantly than many other groups, not because English is not their first language (as if this were a problem itself), but because of what this implies in terms of class, race and minority status, the working conditions (or unemployment) of their parents or guardians, the limited access to online resources, or the struggles they face not just within, but also against, the educational system.

Apparently, it takes a crisis like a global pandemic to nudge decision makers and powerful employers into long-overdue action. No doubt, the vulnerability perceived by more affluent and powerful social groups may propel the impetus for immediate change in certain sectors of society, though workers in these sectors are just as likely to be forgotten once the pandemic recedes. Across Canada and Australia, for example, the unsafe conditions for seniors and workers in long-term care homes have focused a sharp lens on government neglect and the crucial need to raise wages for caregivers. We await the outcome. Perhaps we might hope for positive developments with respect to education and the exacerbation of inequities encountered by ELs in the United States. Of note, and close to the publication of this book, the influential TESOL organization (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) is scheduled to host an advocacy and policy summit in June 2021, bringing together second/additional language experts, administrators from the US Department of Education, and Members of the House of Representatives. Summit discussion topics indicate a focus on improving conditions

and PSE opportunities for EL learners including K-12 settings such as Brighton High School. If summit participants are looking for an evidence-based study with effective and principled recommendations for action, they would be hard pressed to find anything more relevant than Yasuko Kanno's *English Learners' Access to Postsecondary Education: Neither College nor Career Ready*. We are thrilled to have this essential text as part of our series.

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