



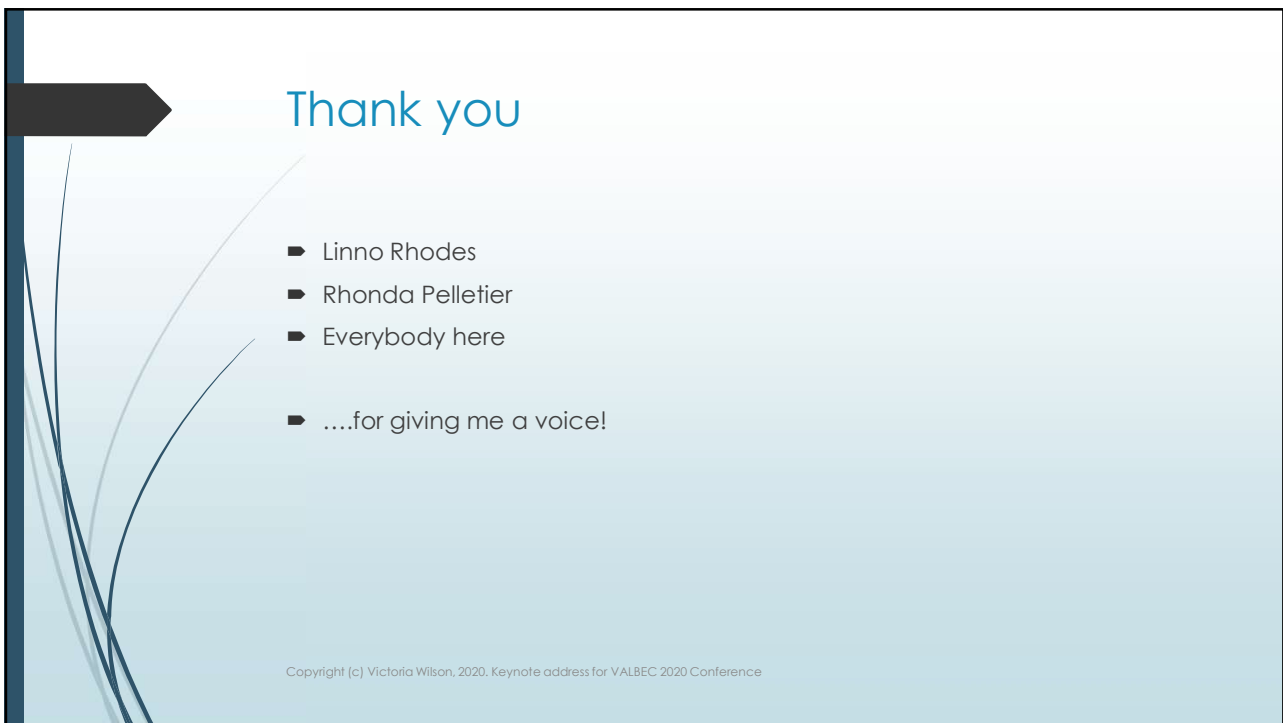
Embracing our learners' voices in teaching and research

VALBEC 2020 Keynote

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Thank you

- Linno Rhodes
- Rhonda Pelletier
- Everybody here
-for giving me a voice!

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Why voice?

- ▶ Triggering to be not listened to/shut down/talked over/shouted down
- ▶ Cursory listening “I have listened carefully and I hear you” -> then take no notice of what they have said

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Having a voice: a fundamental human need

- ▶ “Feeling listened to and understood changes our physiology”
 - ▶ (van der Kolk, 2104, p 232)

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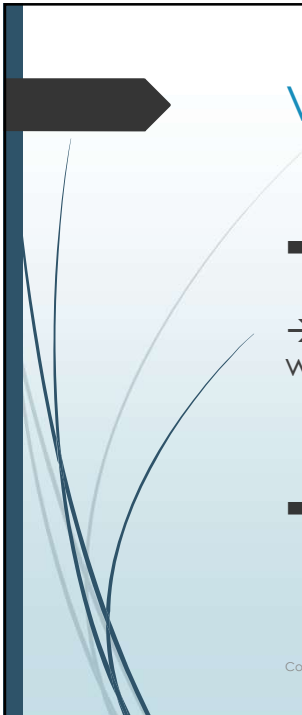
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- “Social support is not the same as merely being in the presence of others. The critical issue is *reciprocity*: being truly heard and seen by the people around us, feeling that we are held in someone else’s mind and heart”
 - van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 2014, p. 79.
- True belonging = feelings of visibility and ability to have meaningful input into communities

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Voice & mental health

- Not being listened to/heard triggers the amygdala (Schwartz) → fight or flight
 - One of top 5 causes of amygdala hijack in the workplace (Schwartz).
- a lack of voice and autonomy worsens mental health to the point of perpetuating chronic mental distress (Chamberlin, 1977/2012; O’Hagan, 1994/2014)

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Trauma-informed principles

- Having a voice relates to:
 - Safety & security → sense of acceptance
 - Social support & belonging
 - Justice
 - A sense of agency
 - Recognition of strengths
 - Valuing of identities

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English & voice

- Access to higher education, employment & training,
- Integration and acceptance
- Empower our ss to speak for themselves

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Learning English = having literal voice in Australia

- "Learning language is very important for everybody. It is the key to every locked door.... English opens the doors to study at university and to find better work opportunities. This is what young motivated people want to do. Learning the language makes you a stable and strong person. No language means you are like a deaf, blind person."
- *- Merna Dolmay (Wilson, Babaei, Sawa & Dolmay, forthcoming)*

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Refugees & disbelief

- Refugees also face mistrust & "culture of disbelief" as part of asylum seeking process
- Refugee-background students routinely disbelieved about sub-optimal experiences of learning English in Australia & reasons for wanting to go to uni (for English & beyond)
- All serves to silence their voices

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Survivors & disbelief

- ▶ Literature on trauma replete with metaphors & literal speech of having no voice/ being silenced
- ▶ Trauma survivors often disbelieved & mistrusted, esp. sexual & family abuse
- ▶ 'Just World' theory
- ▶ "discreditable identity of the mental patient", Pilgrim, p18
- ▶ "For many survivors, telling their stories is an act of resistance against the perpetrators' attempts to silence them." Rinaldo 2011

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'voice' in a philosophical sense

"Voice is more than an academic short-hand for a person's point of view. It is an expression of individuality in the face of negative social stereotypes: an act of self-validation that can be examined as metaphor for protest."

- ▶ Campbell, p. 116

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Voice & marginalisation

- ▶ “When *any* **oppressed or excluded group’s understandings are ignored or rejected**, whether on the basis of sexuality, gender, race, age, culture, class, belief, or disability, they tend to be presented as inferior, deviant or defective”
- Beresford & Boxall, p 78

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Voice & marginalisation (cont)

- ▶ Indigenous Voice to Parliament “will mean **listening to mob is compulsory** and **allowing Indigenous input into policy will be mandated**”
 - Megan Davis, UNSW Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous
- ▶ Disability Movement, Nothing About Us Without Us

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No voice = misrepresentation

- Being denied the opportunity to speak for themselves “tends to result in their being presented by others in **distorted, patronising, and pathologising ways.**”

■ (Beresford & Boxall, p 78)

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- About TESOL and trauma:

- “He is extremely suspicious and untrusting of others, finding it difficult to reveal personal information about himself or allow anyone to get to know him. [He] **may be** suffering from what is termed by psychologists as refugee neurosis.”

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Trauma...in social terms

Trauma shatters:

- ▶ Trust
- ▶ Worldview
- ▶ Sense of safety
- ▶ Sense of meaning
- ▶ Sense of connection



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- ▶ The student “**appears** to lack any form of motivation to learn English, either instrumental or integrative.”
- ▶ Or maybe not....

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Insider voice in education research

- *'Students don't actually know what is best for them'*
- Student voice often "something to be measured, administered, registered, and controlled" or silenced "under an ideology of control and management" (Giroux, 1997, p. 124)

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- "Students are very perceptive about what helps or hinders their learning" (Smyth, 2011, p. 99),
- need "to recognize and reposition students as authorities on and authors of their own educational experiences and representations of those experiences" (Cook-Sather, 2007, p. 390)

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Insider voice in education research (cont)

- Predictor of student success: “a sense of ownership because they feel “heard” by university leaders” (Schreiner, 2017, p. 16) →

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Insider voice in mental health research

- qualitative mental health research
 - researcher not sole expert
 - shares expert space with those who have lived experience (Davidson, Ridgway, Schmutte, & O'Connell, 2009)
- Values “experiential as well as academic knowledge” (Gillard et al., 2010, p. 574).

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Other insider voice in research

- Refugee voices are crucial for decision-making processes about issues which directly affect other refugees and in "identifying where changes can be made to systems" (Rafferty et al., 2019, p. 26).
- Research *with* rather than research *on*
- Richer research discoveries

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Advocacy research

- not speaking *for* participants but giving them the spaces and opportunities to speak for themselves (Smyth et al., 2014, p. 73).
- Involve research participants as:
 - Co-authors
 - Co-designers of the study

Participants should always have the right to

- Check, edit
- Withdraw
- Reframe the conversation → What outsiders think matters may not be what matters to insiders

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“Tears in my eyes ‘cause somebody finally understood”

- Darragh, Sample, Krieger (2000). Study about brain injury patients & their perceptions of health practitioners.
- Topic was not originally the point of the study, but emerged from stories of participants.
- “many professionals in the fields of health care and community services continue to view clients as persons with little to contribute to the conversation about important qualities of good care.” p 192

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Student Voice & TESOL

- Noticeably absent from a lot of ESL teaching books → mainstream literature dominated by...everything else.
- When we do interview students, we find things like:

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What insider research finds matters in (ESL) teaching:

- Caring & kindness
- Respect
- Treating ELLs like developing English speakers rather than deficient native speakers
- Sharing & respecting cultures
- Being able to talk! (not "muted")
 - Having the linguistic tools
 - AND the space/opportunity

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Today I picked up my son from uni for the final time.....6 weeks in and he's had a dreadful time. So much so, he's decided to leave.

All online lesson means he has no interaction with his peers, so no peer to peer support or learning

Online lessons with all the chat function turned off so they can't ask questions

Source: Linked In, November 2020

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The Guardian, 2018, survey from a UK uni)

What do students want most? To be treated with respect

I was surprised to see students at my university ask for their lecturers to talk to them 'as though I'm a person'

"treat me and talk to me as though I'm a person"

"Some academics act with contempt and irritation for the people they should want to inspire, educate, and collaborate with."

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"why don't academics have more humanity?"

"Students identified kindness, integrity and understanding as the most important things that would change their student experience."

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Not having a voice in the classroom

- Teachers who talk too much or don't allow students to talk → deeply disliked.
- Student is not really going to learn how to use the language (except how to listen)
- Boring & disengaging
- Feel as though they are not valued, not trusted

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Having a voice in the classroom

- Dialogic teaching & critical pedagogy
- Lower teacher talk time → students get to develop & practise their English
- Sharing of expert status → student identities & “people of knowledge”
- Students feel valued

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Conclusion

“They try to ask me as many questions about my culture, about me. And that makes me comfortable with them, to talk to them. They will not judge me because of my religion or anything else. And that makes me feel accepted.”

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