



Maria Antonieta Alba Celani, OBE (1923 – 2018)

A tribute

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Diminutive as she was in stature, Maria Antonieta Alba Celani (‘Antonieta’) was a towering figure in the area of English language teaching pedagogy, with a reputation that justifiably spread beyond her native Brazil to other countries, both as an indefatigable author of books, articles and conference papers on English Language teaching and Teacher Training as well as a frequent contributor to international conferences and meetings.

A practising teacher of English at school, undergraduate and postgraduate level, she established her reputation early on, after a Masters and Doctorate from the Institute of Education in London, as an outstanding and inspirational teacher-trainer. On her return to Brazil she was instrumental in establishing the Postgraduate Department of LAEL (Linguistics Applied to Language Teaching) at PUC-SP, where her “reflective/critical” approach to training many outstanding teachers was developed and remained her guiding principle throughout her professional life. It is best summed up in a 2002 paper where she argues that teachers should learn their craft....

1. Visiting Lecturer with LAEL and the Brazilian ESP Project, 1980 – 85.



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“não só como indivíduos reflexivos em relação a sua prática mas também como mediadores em um trabalho reflexivo junto a outros professores em suas escolas e regiões”².

And it was this philosophy that informed and led to the enormous success of the “Brazilian ESP Project”, which I was privileged to be a part of in its founding years between 1980-85, and which still continues today supporting teachers of English to postgraduates in Brazilian universities.

The vision for this project was conceived in 1978/9 by Antonieta with my predecessor in the post of Visiting Lecturer, Maurice Broughton, after they carried out an extensive fact-finding tour of Brazil’s Federal Universities. The aim became a focus on English language teaching to Postgraduates in those universities, based exclusively on the reading skills needed by postgraduates and researchers to access articles, journals and books in their specialist subject, which were, at that time, predominantly published in English.

To realise a such a vision resources, financial and human are needed, and here Antonieta, through her conviction and commitment to the Project, managed to persuade not one government but two – the Brazilian and the British – to provide finance and personnel to implement the challenging task she had set herself. And persuade them she did, over many years, as the Project’s success became increasingly clear: three visiting personnel from the UK posted to Brazil for five or more years, scholarships for teachers attending courses both in Brazil and the UK, numerous leading exponents of ESP visiting every year to lead national, regional and local seminars, publications funded by the Project and a Resource Centre set up at PUC, again with its own dedicated personnel.

But the core of the Project’s success, and its “unique selling point” was that critical reflective approach to the task, and the “multiplier effect” among the teaching staff at the universities themselves. Antonieta nurtured and supported these teams of teachers, infected

2. Celani, Maria Antonieta (2002), *Professores e formadores em mudança: relato de um processo de reflexão e transformação da prática docente*, Mercado de Letras, Campinas, SP.

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them with her own conviction and confidence, and, to the local and regional co-ordinator teachers, gave them the opportunity to develop management and PR skills empowering them in their task of persuading their university authorities to award further time, money and space to the project. English for Special purposes teachers became the envy of their university colleagues for their assuredness in their methodology and the rich exchange of ideas they gained from precisely those reflective and creative practices instilled in the Project by its self-effacing but dynamic creator. When the Resource Centre was set up, accessible to any teacher in the Project, much of what was held there derived from materials devised and tested by the teachers themselves in their Project classrooms.

This was a “multiplier effect” emanating as much from a very human approach to teacher development - identifying talents, developing skills for the classroom and beyond - as from its “technical” components. All the participants felt themselves part of a personal endeavour as well as a pedagogical one. It was this shared vision that made us all colleagues and joint-beneficiaries of a mission that was set in motion and continues today, thanks to the perception, dedication and care of Antonietta Celani.