AFFECT AND CARE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION SERIES

Love, Healing, and Hope

Transformative Practices in Decolonial ELT through Positive Psychology

Julian Chen, Leonardo Veliz, & Miguel Farias (Eds.)

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Love, Healing, and Hope: Transformative Practices in Decolonial ELT through Positive Psychology

Edited by
Julian Chen, Leonardo Veliz, & Miguel Farias



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Volume 1: *Love, Healing, and Hope: Transformative Practices in Decolonial ELT through Positive Psychology*
Julian Chen, Leonardo Veliz, and Miguel Farias (Editors)

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FOREWORD

Flourishing and Freedom: Reimagining Positive Psychology Through a Decolonial Lens in ELT

Tammy Gregersen

During a professional development workshop for a group of multinational foreign language teachers, I asked them to reflect on what "wellbeing" meant in their classrooms and to provide examples. Several reached for terms in their own languages—concepts of human flourishing, hope, or collective harmony that had no direct English equivalent. As they compared these expressions, the group realized that a "universal" wellness framework did not recognize any of them. In that moment, they saw both the promise and the limits of Positive Psychology (PP) in ELT: Wellbeing cannot be comprehensive if the conceptual repertoire it draws upon excludes the ways different cultures name and understand what it means to be in harmony and flourishing. As we continued the workshop, I asked teachers to identify a moment in their language learning histories that made them feel "seen." Most wrote about encouragement, achievement, or mastery—until one teacher paused and said, "It wasn't when I succeeded in English. It was when my instructor invited me to

explain an idea in my own language first." The room became quiet. The comment revealed something essential: Wellbeing emerges not from English proficiency, but from *the legitimacy of one's linguistic identity*. The activity, intended as a simple PP exercise, unexpectedly illuminated the deeper design of coloniality in ELT—reminding everyone present that wellbeing is relational, contextual, and inseparable from the permission to speak as a whole self.

On the surface, PP and decoloniality may seem to originate from divergent philosophical traditions. The former has often been associated with Western psychological paradigms of happiness and individual flourishing; the latter, with critical movements that challenge precisely those Western-centered ways of knowing and being. Yet, within the context of language education, these two perspectives find a profound meeting point: Both seek to restore the *human* to the heart of education. One of my favorite quotes from within the arena of PP comes from the late Christopher Peterson (2006): "People matter."

First, it is important to note that PP in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) did not evolve simply to counter negative emotions, but to *rebalance* a research tradition long dominated by deficit framings—where learners were often approached through what was missing, lacking, or in need of repair—and to spotlight a fuller understanding of flourishing that integrates positive emotions, strengths, and growth potential alongside the real challenges inherent in language learning (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Mercer & Gregersen, 2025). Decoloniality, in contrast, calls attention to the historical and ongoing effects of coloniality in education—the privileging of English, the silencing of local theories of knowledge, and the power structures that continue to define whose knowledge and emotions are legitimized in the

classroom, among other violations (Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Motha, 2020). In their essence, PP and decoloniality offer complementary offsets: one attends to *flourishing*, the other to *freedom*.

A personal case in point: One of my favorite PP activities to use with my pre-service language teachers revolves around the notion of "signature strengths" (Seligman et al., 2005). In one instance that occurred while I was teaching in the United Arab Emirates, I facilitated a "signature strengths" activity where my students generated ideas about how to use their own personal signature strengths in novel ways while preparing and delivering an English teaching simulation. The discussion was lively and insightful, but after class, one student lingered and said that although she loved choosing a Values in Action (VIA) strength to reimagine her teaching, the idea only came alive when she drafted it in Arabic, her first language. After taking the VIA survey online which showed her top strength as creativity, she planned an activity that blended music and poetry. She lamented that when she switched to English, it felt flatter—like the activity belonged less to her and that her most creative ideas are still generated in Arabic. That comment stayed with me. My PP-inspired exercise had aimed to raise confidence, yet it unintentionally reduced the emotional weight of an experience that existed outside the boundaries of English. Her insight sharpened my understanding of how wellbeing practices can reproduce linguistic hierarchies if we are not attentive to them.

Second, I would be remiss to not mention that at the intersection of PP and decolonialization is a profoundly humane goal: to nurture a pedagogy of care and liberation. PP undergirded with a decolonial foundation encourages us to reimagine "flourishing" not as an individual pursuit of happiness,

but as a collective venture embedded in justice, relationality, and belonging. It reframes wellbeing as a process of *recovering dignity and voice* for both learners and teachers, particularly in contexts shaped by linguistic imperialism and global inequality. To flourish, in this sense, is to reclaim the right to define one's emotional, linguistic, and cultural self on one's own terms.

The first 17 years of my academic career were enjoyed in Chile, and because I had been immersed in Spanish for all that time, my language skills and understanding of the culture had developed steadily. Upon recently being invited back to provide a PP workshop, I asked my in-service teacher participants to discuss a classroom challenge using notions from within the PP paradigm — concepts such as hope, resilience, and gratitude. One teacher quietly asked if they could express their reflection in Spanish, their mother tongue. When they did, the tone, nuance, and courage in their voice shifted the room. At that moment, the realization hit me: Flourishing was not about adopting English PP terminology but about giving students the right to name their emotional worlds in the languages where those emotions actually *live*.

Third, this intersection between PP and decoloniality also invites us to rethink what we consider "good" in psychological or pedagogical terms. PP, with its focus on strengths, can help us see forms of socio-emotional wisdom that come from local, Indigenous, and plurilingual traditions — not just from Western models of flourishing. Decoloniality, meanwhile, reminds us that any wellbeing framework must be created *with* communities, not placed *on* them. When we bring these perspectives together, they create a more critical and context-sensitive version of PP — one that supports the emotional lives of learners and teachers while

actively resisting the intellectual hierarchies that have shaped English language teaching.

I learned this lesson during a PP workshop for a retirement community in the USA that I provided at the invitation of the activities director. Among the five elderly participants were two women from India. I introduced an activity centered on identifying small daily "uplifts." They listened politely, then began explaining how their own cultural practices of communal gratitude circles already served the same purpose — just more relationally. Together, we reshaped the activity to build on their tradition, not replace it. That moment reframed for me what ethical, context-sensitive PP must look like.

Fourth, the notion of positive institutions (Seligman, 2011) offers a powerful bridge between PP and decolonial aims. Institutions — universities, schools, industries — can either reproduce inequity or become agents of flourishing. Reimagining them as positive institutions means cultivating cultures of trust, care, and inclusivity that validate the diverse knowledges and identities that constitute our profession. Such institutions embody what both PP and decoloniality ultimately seek: a world in which education contributes not only to achievement, but to humanity.

In my career, I have been privileged to work in different cultures around the world, and I have witnessed how institutional routines — "English only" dictates, standardized syllabi, rigid testing policies — can inadvertently diminish the very learners they aim to serve. I have also experienced how institutions can choose to move toward care and inclusivity, and how those small shifts reverberate through an entire learning ecology. Seeing this up close strengthened my belief that institutions must be designed with, not merely for, the communities they hold. In my

own work designing teacher education programs, I have come to believe that institutions flourish when they treat wellbeing as a shared responsibility rather than an add-on. My hope is that more institutions will recognize that cultures of care are not decorative; they are transformative.

This volume situates itself at that fertile intersection. The chapters that follow lead us toward a vision of ELT that is at once affectively aware, ethically grounded, and socially transformative. The authors invite us to consider how teachers and learners can flourish without erasing difference, how wellbeing can coexist with critique, and how language classrooms can become sites of both joy and justice. In doing so, the contributions herewith extend the promise of a decolonial PP — an approach that reclaims wellbeing as an act of resistance, resilience, and relational human flourishing.

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CHAPTER 1

The Loving Turn in ELT: An Introduction

Julian Chen, Leonardo Veliz, & Miguel Farias

In today's world, English language teaching (ELT) grapples with dominant monolithic and monoepistemic ideologies that continue to perpetuate linguistic inequities and social, racial, and epistemic injustices. From the enduring 'wounds' of racialization (e.g. García et al., 2021; Subedi, 2008; Veliz et al., 2024) to processes of standardization (e.g., Dovchin, 2020; Dovchin & Dryden, 2022; Jenkins & Leung, 2019) and other inequitable practices (Meighan, 2022; Meighan & Veliz, 2026), ELT researchers, teachers, and educators confront challenges that shape both pedagogical practices and students' lived experiences. In this context**,** these challenges are deeply intertwined with issues of diversity, multilingualism, and multiculturalism, as English continues to function simultaneously as a global lingua franca and a gatekeeper of legitimacy within educational and social hierarchies (Gimenez et al., 2025; Tupas, 2019; Veliz, 2024). Yet, cultural and linguistic diversity is still frequently positioned as a problem to be erased in English-dominant settings rather than as an asset to be valued, reinforcing the ongoing invisibility of minoritized languages and epistemologies. In response, there is a growing recognition of the need for a

loving decolonial pedagogy – a transformative and inclusive approach that seeks to dismantle colonial hegemonies embedded within educational systems while foregrounding care, relationality, and lovingness in pedagogy (Mignolo, 2011; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017).

Indeed, decolonial approaches in ELT have provided an avenue for broader discussions around de/recentering power dynamics along with methodological and epistemological ways of knowing, being and doing. Nonetheless, we posit that much of the effort to shift from Eurocentric to local decolonial perspectives has resulted in heightened awareness of inequities and inequalities and (c)overt divide between the Global North and Global South. Within this divide, the voices of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse teachers and learners are often marginalized or homogenized under Anglocentric impositions of English proficiency and native-like communicative competence. This reveals how monolingual and monocultural hegemonies persist even in ostensibly pluralistic spaces (Fielding & Harbon, 2022; Slaughter & Cross, 2021; Veliz & Chen, 2024; Veliz et al., 2025). While the inspiring spirit of critical pedagogy as a 'decolonization' approach has been that of liberating the oppressed from the oppressor (Freire, 1993), much of the ontological and epistemological scholarly work has geared more toward instilling a sense of confrontation through disrupting, contesting, and dismantling oppressive systems of knowledge and practice. To counter this seemingly negative approach, we call for postcritical pedagogy (Hodgson et al., 2017) that strives for a critical love for the world and humanity as mirrored in this volume.

In response to the enduring harms produced by dominant framings in English language education – such as native

speakerism, racialization, accentism, and broader forms of epistemic injustice – this volume seeks to champion a deeply humanizing approach grounded in (critical) love, healing, care, protection, and hope (Burke et al., 2008; Jain et al., 2026; Salazar, 2013). These framings have long positioned certain languages, accents, and ways of knowing as deficient or illegitimate, leaving profound and ongoing wounds for learners, teachers, and communities. Rather than remaining solely within projects of critique and deconstruction, this caring and loving approach moves toward more ecological pedagogies that nurture transformative and restorative thinking, practices, relationships, and collaborations between the Global North and South. Such rebalanced (healing) pedagogies affirm linguistic and cultural diversity, recognizing multilingualism not as a deviation from a monolingual norm but as an integral expression of human plurality. Within this paradigm, educators are able to cultivate classrooms that honor all linguistic repertoires, where students' home and heritage languages coexist with English in dialogic, relational, and equitable ways. Ultimately, this shift acknowledges the interconnectedness of all beings and underscores the importance of fostering inclusive, compassionate, and life-affirming environments in language education and beyond.

Drawing on Freire's conception of critical pedagogy as an act of love, this book foregrounds the transformative power of care, hope, empathy, and relationality in educational practice. Within this framing, *lovingness* is not understood as naïve or apolitical, but as a deliberate ethical and pedagogical stance – one that offers the necessary counterweight to deficit-oriented pedagogies grounded in native speakerism, proficiency, standardization, competitiveness, and other segregating practices

upheld by regimes of discrimination. In this sense, lovingness represents the generative side of the pedagogical coin, enabling educators to move beyond harm-focused critique toward practices that actively restore dignity, belonging, and humanity in language education.

This orientation is further informed by insights from Positive Psychology (PP) (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012), which we engage not as an individualistic or depoliticized framework, but as a transformative paradigm when situated within an ecological, critical, and socially just educational landscape. In line with Mercer and Gregersen's (2023, p. 1) articulation of PP, we embrace an understanding of wellbeing that is fundamentally relational and collective:

> *PP is concerned with ensuring the development of compassionate interpersonal relationships and a positive experience for all stakeholders, equipping individuals with skills and competences to flourish in the classroom and beyond… Everyone's wellbeing is interconnected. It is not just an individual trait, but it is also socially determined.*

When read alongside decolonial and critical pedagogical traditions, this relational view of wellbeing reinforces the need for educational spaces that foreground care, mutual recognition, and collective flourishing, particularly for those historically marginalized by linguistic, racial, and epistemic hierarchies. Together, Freirean pedagogy and critically oriented PP provide a powerful lens for reimagining language education as a site of healing, resistance, and hope.

When Decoloniality and Positive Psychology Collocate

In recent years, educational research has increasingly brought together diverse theoretical traditions to open new conceptual and pedagogical pathways. Building on this dialogic orientation, this volume examines what becomes possible when decolonial perspectives are brought into conversation with PP to reimagine ELT, particularly in and from the Global South. Rather than treating these frameworks as epistemologically incompatible, we explore their productive synergies when PP is critically reoriented away from individualism and toward relational, ecological, and socially just pedagogies.

Decolonial projects extend beyond critique and deconstruction by actively affirming diversity, relationality, and interconnected ways of being, knowing, and doing (Kumaravadivelu, 2016) – many of which are deeply informed by Indigenous philosophies and worldviews (Meighan, 2023). Indigenous knowledges offer rich foundations for challenging dominant Eurocentric epistemologies, as their cultural codes resist systems of division, exclusion, racism, and injustice that sustain colonial and capitalist structures. Values such as love, hope, healing, resilience, and reciprocity function as powerful counter-hegemonic forces that disrupt the colonial matrix of power and its neoliberal extensions. When grounded in Indigenous worldviews and paired with a critical rethinking of psychological principles, PP can meaningfully align with decolonial projects, giving rise to what we conceptualize here as a *decolonial Positive Psychology*.

Indeed, decolonial approaches that move beyond exposing coloniality to embrace hope, resilience, love, and social justice as central to sustainable educational ecologies resonate strongly with the relational and affective dimensions of PP from its

inception. The integration of decoloniality and PP thus offers a promising conceptual framework for transformative and emancipatory pedagogies. Because language education is inherently embedded in linguistic, discursive, and semiotic practices, it occupies a particularly powerful position in advancing decolonial pedagogies grounded in care, hope, healing, and nurturing – pedagogical orientations that directly challenge colonial systems of racism, hatred, exclusion, and epistemic injustice.

As evidenced throughout this volume, decoloniality and PP can work hand in hand to advance both the political and socio-affective goals co-constructed within Global South communities. These synergies resist colonialism, dependency, oppression, and neoliberal logics, while opening space for alternative imaginaries of language education. The chapters included here engage with multiple layers of meaning emerging from these intersections. Through situated narratives and contextualized pedagogical praxes, contributors illuminate how decolonial PP frameworks become dynamic, intersectional, and responsive to diverse grassroots realities. In doing so, the volume moves beyond singular paradigms to offer a more holistic, plural, and relational account of ELT experiences across global contexts.

In curating this volume, we sought to amplify the voices of committed educators whose stories capture the tensions between political uncertainty, institutional constraints, and their enduring hope, critical love, and ethical commitment to more just and equitable futures. In the precarious and complex worlds in which we live, teach, and research, we invite readers to engage with these heartfelt narratives slowly and attentively, listening carefully to the textures and silences embedded in the voices represented. Decoloniality, hope, lovingness, and healing require

such pauses – moments of ethical listening that allow us to better understand the lived and felt experiences of those positioned at the margins.

In conclusion, we conceptualize positive emotions – such as hope, engagement, joy, and gratitude – not as ends in themselves, but as enablers that support the questioning of colonial ideologies, the resistance of hegemonic norms, and the creation of ethical, safe, and affirming educational spaces. These affective orientations open pathways for celebrating localized knowledges, languages, and cultures, while promoting Indigenous and community-based ways of thinking, doing, and knowledge sharing. In this sense, decolonial PP becomes both a pedagogical stance and a political commitment toward justice, equity, and collective flourishing.

From Epistemic Fatigue to Flourishing Praxis: A Post-Critical Vision for ELT

While the collocation of decoloniality and PP provides the epistemic scaffolding for a more hopeful, inclusive vision of ELT, its transformative potential ultimately lies in how these ideas are enacted in pedagogical, affective, and relational practices. It is precisely within this space of praxis that our collective commitments to love, care, and healing become most consequential. Drawing on calls for a post-critical turn in education, we advocate for reclaiming the affective, ethical, and relational dimensions of teaching and learning – dimensions that have often been sidelined by an exclusive focus on critique (Hodgson et al., 2017; Wortmann, 2019).

The notion of *epistemic fatigue* in ELT emerges from growing concern with the limits of the critical turn. While critical scholarship has been indispensable in exposing the political,

ideological, and colonial underpinnings of ELT – what some might describe as its "dark sides"—it has at times privileged critique over care, confrontation over compassion, and deconstruction over reconstruction. When critique becomes an end in itself, educators and learners may be left in a state of perpetual tension, exhaustion, or disillusionment. Moreover, an overreliance on critical binaries risks reproducing the very logics it seeks to unsettle – oppressor/oppressed, colonizer/colonized, English/non-English, native/non-native – thereby reinforcing separation rather than fostering solidarity, relationality, and healing.

In response, we call for the enactment of a post-critical pedagogy grounded in critical love, relationality, and healing. Such an approach does not abandon critique but rather focus on rehumanizing education through an explicit recognition of shared vulnerability, interdependence, and ethical responsibility. Post-critical pedagogy transcends prescriptive and normative models of teaching by embracing the social and emotional dimensions of human experience – empathy, trust, hope, forgiveness, and mutual recognition – as central to educational transformation. Love, in this framing, is neither sentimental nor apolitical; it is a radical and deliberate act of resistance against dehumanizing logics that fragment, hierarchize, and exclude forms of being, knowledging and languaging. It is for this reason that we name it *critical love*. Healing, likewise, is understood as both a personal and collective process – an ethical commitment to repairing relationships fractured by linguistic hierarchies, racialized divisions, and enduring colonial wounds. Viewed through a decolonial PP lens, language education is reimagined as an ecological space of relationality and reciprocity, where knowledge, emotion, critique, and care coexist in productive and

generative tension. This shift from epistemic fatigue to flourishing praxis invites educators and learners alike to reenvision ELT not only as a site of resistance, but also as a space of renewal, restoration, and collective becoming.

Mission of the Book

This edited volume comes with a mission. It aims to explore the transformative potential of synergizing decolonial pedagogy and PP in ELT contexts, be it in Global North and/or South. It delves into how language educators can use decolonial frameworks to address systemic inequalities, question dominant narratives, and create inclusive and loving learning environments. By centering care, healing, and restorative practices, decolonial pedagogy and PP offer a viable pathway for educators to engage with students in ways that (re)affirm and celebrate their rich experiences, imagination, heritage languages, diversity, and plurilingual identities.

We have gathered initiatives designed by scholars, educators, teams, and communities engaged in the pursuit of nurturing, compassionate, and loving horizons that chart ELT territories of equality and restorative justice. Through an inclusive collection of insightful and heartfelt chapters, this book explores theoretical underpinnings, case studies, and best practices that highlight the efficacy of decolonial pedagogy and PP. It champions humanizing approaches to curriculum design, classroom practice, teacher education, and community engagement, all aimed at fostering critical consciousness, empathy, and agency among teachers and learners. We here share lived experiences in implementing some of these positive frames that include “flow, hope, courage, well-being, optimism, creativity, happiness, grit, resilience, strengths, and laughter with

the aim of enhancing learners' linguistic progress" (Dewaele et al., 2019, p. 1). We are hopeful that this book can inspire and empower educators to transform their teaching practices as a deeply humanizing and liberating endeavour, rooted in love and empathy for all learners.

Intended Readership

This volume is written for those who envision language education as a space of transformation, care, and justice. We hope it serves as both an inspiration and a catalyst for change, inviting readers to reimagine and enact nurturing, compassionate, and loving horizons in education. Our audience includes scholars, educators, research teams, schoolteachers, and community practitioners who are collectively engaged in redefining language learning and teaching as praxis of equality, hope, and restorative justice. Through a collection of thought-provoking and knowledge-sharing chapters, the book offers theoretical reflections, case studies, and pedagogical illustrations that reveal how decolonial pedagogy and PP can join forces to humanize curriculum design, classroom practice, teacher education, and community engagement. Each contribution foregrounds relationality, empathy, love and agency as essential to fostering critical consciousness and sustainable forms of educational transformation across intersectionality in ELT.

Hence, this edited book will be of great interest to the disciplines in applied linguistics, second language studies, multilingualism, psycholinguistics, and TESOL. It is also appealing to undergraduate students in the Applied Linguistics programs who are keen to know more about different ways of affirming and celebrating language learners' colorful lived experiences, imaginations, heritage languages, and plurilingual

identities. Language educators will also find it beneficial to better understand the use of decolonial PP frameworks to address systemic inequalities, question dominant narratives, and create inclusive and loving learning environments. Postgraduate students and researchers alike will benefit from the inclusive research approaches and implications drawn from care, healing, and restorative practices that see diversity as an asset, not a deficit.

Structure of the Book

This edited volume is organized into Foreword, an Introductory Chapter by the editors, three interconnected parts that collectively advance a relational, and justice-oriented reimagining of ELT at the intersection of decoloniality and PP, and a final Afterword by the book editors. The Foreword, kindly and generously written by Tammy Gregersen, reimagines PP in ELT through a decolonial lens, arguing that flourishing cannot be separated from linguistic legitimacy, cultural dignity, and freedom from colonial hierarchies that privilege English and Western models of wellbeing. Drawing on lived pedagogical moments across diverse contexts, Tammy positions decolonial PP as a relational, justice-oriented praxis in which wellbeing is collectively enacted through care, voice, and the right to define one's emotional world in one's own language. This ties in well with some of the ideas we put forth in this Introduction, one of which is that decoloniality and PP can be productively integrated. Such integration is, however, no easy task. It starts with honest and profound recognition that ELT is deeply implicated in colonial, racialized and epistemic injustices, and that critique alone is no longer sufficient or effective. A humanizing turn with a focus on care, love, healing and hope is much needed.

Part I '*Decolonial Frameworks and Critical Transformation in English Language Education*' comprises **five chapters** that establish the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the volume. These chapters critically interrogate dominant ideologies in ELT – including coloniality, native speakerism, epistemic injustice, and linguistic hierarchies – while offering decolonial lenses to rethink language, knowledge, and pedagogy. Together, they set the groundwork for transformative educational imaginaries that move beyond critique toward ethical, situated, and relational change. **Part II *'Love, Empathy, and Care: Healing Practices in Language Education'*** also brings together **five chapters** that foreground the affective, relational, and ethical dimensions of teaching and learning. Drawing on critical love, decolonial pedagogy, and relationally oriented PP, these contributions explore how practices of care, empathy, hope, and healing can disrupt deficit narratives and foster more humane and inclusive language education spaces. The chapters highlight pedagogical praxis that supports collective wellbeing, belonging, and restorative educational relationships. Finally, **Part III *'Unsettling Normativity for Inclusion and Social Justice'*** includes **four chapters** that challenge normalized assumptions and exclusionary practices in ELT. Focusing on issues of inclusion, equity, and social justice, these contributions unsettle hegemonic norms related to language, identity, race, and legitimacy, while showcasing pedagogical and institutional practices that resist marginalization. Together, the chapters offer critical yet hopeful pathways for advancing socially just, inclusive, and decolonial futures in language education.

Part I opens up with a thought-provoking chapter, Chapter 2, "**Küme mogen as Positive and Decolonial**

Intercultural Principle in the Mapuche Culture: A Conversation with Elisa Loncon", by Miguel Farías and Elisa Loncon. They challenge us to critically reexamine our ELT practices and what we can all learn from Indigenous knowledges, cultures, languages, and ways of life in response to the crisis of climate change, and Anglocentric raciolinguistics that still permeates the ELT landscape. Through a dynamic conversation Miguel and Elisa (a renowned Mapuche educator and activist) invite readers to critically reexamine conventional ELT practices by integrating Indigenous knowledge, languages, and ways of life. Central to their discussion is the Mapuche Flower of Knowledge, a visual and metaphorical representation of ten interconnected dimensions of well-being rooted in decolonial, healing, and caring values. (see Figure 1 in the chapter). The flower embodies balance and relationality among socio-affective, spiritual, ecological, and cognitive dimensions of life. Another integral element in Indigenous ancestral practice is 'storytelling' (similar to the 'yarning circle' practice in the First Nations of Australia), which can also be embodied in ELT practices to promote inclusivity, decoloniality, and empathy. Indeed, we as ELT educators can start to push the boundaries by bringing decolonial and ecological perspectives in our teaching and student learning, raising their awareness and equipping them with criticality and empathy to see the world through the lens of Indigenous knowledges, cultures and languages.

Chapter 3, "Decoloniality as a Conductive Thread to Love and Hope", by Gysele da Silva Colombo-Gomes, further illuminates how decolonial pedagogy nurtured by reimagined love and hope can be enacted in ELT practices in the Global South. Gysele presents findings drawn from a practitioner research project conducted at a public school in Rio de Janeiro

State, one of the low socioeconomic status areas in Brazil. Different from conventional ELT projects situated in Anglocentric models, this transformative project transports us to a pre-service ELT teacher (Pietra) journey where she incorporated decolonial teaching practices informed by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy of love and hope in her teaching practicum working with those disadvantaged fifth graders in class. Gysele employs a critical analysis of the multimodal narratives of Pietra's critical reflections on her weekly teaching practices, visual narratives she created to express teacher emotions in class, and images created by her students to support their writing (see Figures 1-3 in the chapter). These fifth graders, despite their low English proficiency, were pedagogically, intellectually, and emotionally stimulated to articulate their career aspirations enhanced by drawings and reimagine the future using English as a lingua franca. Pietra was able to instill decoloniality, love and hope in her ELT practice whilst empowering these marginalized children to take agency as social actors in every aspect of their life and develop critical thinking to challenge and disrupt power structure of ELT in Brazil. For like-minded ELT teacher educators who are keen to explore this transformative approach, we trust that folks will find this chapter inspiring and applicable to your teaching setting.

In Chapter 4, **A Decolonial Approach to English Language Education in the Global South: Teachers' Voices for Critical Radical Love and Social Transformation,** Luz Ely González-Humanez, Luzkarime Calle-Diaz, and Luis Fernando Noriega examine decolonial approaches to English Language Education (ELE) in Colombia through a trio-ethnographic exploration of the lived and professional experiences of three public school English teachers.

Drawing on critical literacy, critical radical love, critical positive psychology, and the Indigenous-inspired principles of *Buen Vivir*, they illustrate how locally grounded pedagogical practices – such as translanguaging, multimodality, and the centering of student voice and agency – challenge neoliberal bilingualism policies shaped by Global North epistemologies. By foregrounding teachers' reflexive narratives, the chapter demonstrates how decolonial pedagogies reframe wellbeing as a collective, relational, and community-oriented practice rather than an individualized or productivity-driven endeavor. The chapter offers situated insights for Global South contexts, highlighting the transformative potential of curricula rooted in local knowledge, communal flourishing, and social justice.

Similarly, Chapter 5, **A Decolonial Perspective in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Chile: Lessons from Brazil and the Teaching of Portuguese,** by Mila Araújo Fonseca and Patricio A. Pino Castillo, offers similar insights. In a cross-border contribution, the authors challenge the dominance of native-speaker and transmission-based practices that have long characterized language education in Chile. Through a comparative analysis, and drawing on insights from Brazil, the chapter repositions language teaching as a deeply cultural and political act, one that must move beyond technical skill-building to embrace the sociocultural realities, histories, and identities of learners. Mila and Patricio draw on decolonial theory and critical pedagogy frameworks to engage in a critical dialogue around the teaching of English as a foreign language in Chile and Brazil. They also highlight the concept of 'sociogeny', which refers to the ways in which colonial structures have shaped the subjectivities and identities of racialized people(s), and relate it to

'decolonial pedagogy' to suggest a relearning and dispossession of colonial powers.

Part I closes with Chapter 6, "**Transformative Decolonial Practice in English Teacher Education in Brazil: Lovingness and Resistance"** by Suellen Thomaz de Aquino Martins and Ana Maria Ferreira Barcelos. Ana has been working on the topic of lovingness in ELT in Brazil, a theme that stems from the Freirean tradition and is now put under the light of decoloniality, with Suellen as the lead author. Their chapter reports on a study at a teacher education program in Northern Brazil that aimed at introducing reflections on decoloniality and lovingness in ELT practices. As part of a larger project, Suellen and Ana select a sample of data from four teachers to illustrate the discussions prompted by texts on how to introduce lovingness and decoloniality in language teaching in Brazil. The discussion and findings in the study are supported by ideas from Maturana and Varela, Freire, Walsh, and other (decolonial) authors. This chapter highlights the challenges and, more importantly, the transformative potential of love and hope as they engage in dialog in language teacher education.

Part II opens up with Chapter 7, "**What Palestine's Context Teaches English Language Educators: Lessons for Healing during Times of Precarity"**, by Tina Jaber Rafidi, Nader Ayish, Theresa Austin, Rachel Grant and Shelley Wong. Motivated by Paulo Freire's 'combative love' as a liberating critical pedagogy, the authors – who share experiences from Palestine, the UAE, the USA, and Canada – present heartfelt narratives that center the struggles and resilience of marginalized learners. This 'combative love' approach goes beyond passive, conflict avoiding, sentimental love but calls for action (or صمود *sumud*, 'steadfastness' or 'resilience') to stand

together with those being oppressed in Gaza and advocate for justice against violence, oppression, and genocide. Another powerful and humanizing pedagogy embodied in this chapter is collaborative storytelling using photography and digital tools to capture Palestinian students' moment-to-moment lived experiences, stories, and resistance to the erasure of their people's land, culture, and history. As Tina rightly put it, "No one is free unless everyone is free and can struggle for love." We invite you to travel with these inspiring ELT educators and 'listen deeply' through their powerful and heart-wrenching narratives currently taking place and connected to what disrupted education is like in war-torn Gaza.

In Chapter 8, "**Love, Passion, or Toxic Relationship? Decolonial Love and Resistance in the Experience of Public-school English Teachers in Brazil",** Ana Maria F. Barcelos, Viviane Darc Silva Araújo and Raquel Pompéia Teixeira De Melo Oliveira explore the role of pedagogical love (PL) as an avenue to not only disrupt systemic oppression but also empower those whose voices and knowledge systems have been silenced and marginalized. Contextualized in Brazil and focusing on two English language teachers and one teacher educator, the authors draw on the participants' lived experiences to understand the nuanced ways in which they enact PL, and how it is reflected in their love of teaching and of their students. In this context, they advance the notion of 'PL as resistance' to disrupt deficit views and exclusionary narratives of English language students, particularly in public schools. Through vivid and emotionally charged narratives, the authors examine some practical ways of contesting neoliberal forms of oppression in public education and clear examples of how teachers center love and care in their teaching practices.

Similarly, in another emotionally charged narrative that also centers love, healing and care, we find that Andrea Lizasoain in Chapter 9 "**From Challenges to Opportunities: A Turn from Deficit Discourse on Disabilities to Discourse of Lovingness and Diversity in ELT Education",** offers a deeply reflexive account of navigating the dual challenges of teaching and belonging as a hard-of-hearing ELT educator in Chile. This contribution powerfully disrupts deficit-oriented understandings of disability that remain pervasive in teacher education and language learning contexts. By situating personal experience within the wider structures of ableism and exclusion that shape neoliberal education systems, the chapter illuminates how institutional and attitudinal barriers can constrain both teacher well-being and inclusive practice. Yet, rather than focusing on deficit or struggle, the chapter reframes disability through an ethics of lovingness, empathy, care, and values that emerge from critical pedagogy and positive psychology. By moving from a narrative of limitation to one of possibility, this reflection aligns with the book's broader call to reimagine language education through resistance, care, and rehumanization. It invites educators to dismantle deficit discourses and to recognize love, as a critical, ethical, and transformative force, as central to the work of decolonising language education.

Chapter 10, "**Empathy in English Language Teaching at a Public HEI in Pakistan: A Strategy for Healing and Transformation in Postcolonial Global South"**, by Kishwer Nazli, Nida Aftab and Sajida Zaki, engages us in a study to understand the meaning and scope of empathy in ELT and teacher education in post-colonial Pakistan. By reviewing the historical context behind the legacy of English and the

inequalities and differential access it brings, the authors set the stage to approach the data gathered from ELT teacher educators in various positions at Pakistani higher education institutions. They identify four themes in the data collected: empathy in language teaching, empathetic English language practices, developing awareness and skills about empathy, and transforming English language & English language teaching ideologies. In the analysis of these themes, Kishwer, Nida and Sajida reveal that empathy in ELT is an effective strategy for the healing of deep scars left by colonization and rigid pedagogy that sometimes overshadows the identity of learners in the Global South. Yet, the three authors recognize that while teachers and teacher educators acknowledged the transformative and healing impact of empathy on students' learning, they simultaneously identified hindrances caused by institutional constraints and colonial legacies. Undoubtedly, this is a chapter that showcases both the motivation for change and the hindrances that ELT undergoes in Pakistan these days, offering personalized insights into decolonial tensions of teachers and teacher educators.

Part II ends with Chapter 11, "**Language Learning and Forced Migration: Australian Educators on the Relational, Ethical, and Emotional Dimensions of 'Journeying Alongside'"** by Rachel Burke. Rachel critically reflects on what it takes to work with displaced migrant language learners amidst the complex set of variables that frame the social practice of language learning and teaching migrants from diverse backgrounds. Under the conceptual umbrella of Ethics of Care, positive psychology and trauma-informed practice, she takes a political stance on understanding how 15 language educators navigate the personal and pedagogical waters of teaching forced migration learners. Through narrative analysis, four themes

emerged from the data gathered: educator preparedness for 'journeying alongside', learning from experience, being responsive to learner circumstances, and educator self-care. Indeed, Rachel sensibly and politically apprehends through the lens of her own experience and the meanings embedded in the teachers' responses and comments in light of the implications that the practice of teaching forced migration learners may have for language teachers in contexts of (re) settlement. Specifically, a key phrase she uses to understand the scenario of teaching forced migrants is "journeying alongside" that encapsulates the caring and solidarious *acompañamiento* that teachers engage in the interaction with migrant learners and families.

The final theme of the book (Part III) brings together chapters that accentuate critical language awareness (CLA), recognition, and the pursuit of social justice in language education. In Chapter 12, "**Promoting Students' Critical Consciousness, Agency, and Empathy Through Critical Language Awareness (CLA) Writing Pedagogy",** Shawna Shapiro uses her 'Writing and Power' class as a case in point, demonstrating the potentiality of enacting students' CLA in decolonization (Canagarajah, 2024) while building their sense of agency and empathy. This approach transforms a normative academic writing class into a humanizing milieu that uplifts students' wellbeing and belonging. Shawna argues that academic writing programs should not only raise the CLA of multilingual and multidialectal writers, but further equip them with the skills and strategies needed to succeed academically. More important, a CLA approach to academic writing empowers students to see their heritage languages and cultures as assets and make informed decisions (critical consciousness) on whether to use those dominant norms and conventions by reclaiming agency as

capable multilingual and multidialectal writers. To help ELT educators and researchers better grasp this CLA approach to writing, Shawna generously shares her course curriculum, including teaching materials and assignments, which is framed by CLA with the goals of decolonization and positive psychology. We can see clearly how her students' voices are valued, agency established, CLA raised, and empathy built in their engagement with decolonizing course materials and assignments in a writing community, thus fostering positive psychology.

With a focus on critically analyzing textbooks in the Chilean context, Chapter 13 "**Recognizing the Unseen: An Analysis of Theory of Recognition and Positive Psychology in Decolonial ELT within Chilean Textbooks"** by Victor Birkner and Sebastián Mercado, reveals the extent to which a Chilean state-mandated textbook represents diversity, Indigenous knowledges, and affective dimensions of learning such as empathy, hope and resilience. Extensive research in this area (e.g. Goldstein, 2021; Keles & Yazan, 2020; Shah, 2023; Véliz-Campos et al., 2024) has shown the prevalence of underlying Eurocentric ideologies entrenched in English language textbooks. Not surprisingly, Victor and Sebastián uncovered tangential and superficial cultural references to diversity, Indigenous knowledges and affect. To respond to an increasing need of cultural embeddedness of diversity and emotional development of language learners, Victor and Sebastián call for action to engage in community-based pedagogies as an avenue to create a nexus between affective learning and social justice.

Chapter 14 "**Initial teacher education in English Language Teaching in Chile: Cultivating a Transformative and Sustainable Teaching and Learning**

Process" by Diego Alejandro Cabezas Bravo and Mauro Ramos, reveals the impacts of English imperialism and Eurocentric ideologies on the development of ELT in the Global South. As both teacher educators, Diego and Mauro provide insider perspectives on the historical background and tensions between the colonial and Anglocentric hegemonies permeating the Latin American educational systems, and the rich localized resources and heritages, such as Indigenous knowledge and English varieties, being suppressed by the former. Through the eyes and lived experience of a pre-service teacher, Constanza, we witnessed how the colonial legacies deeply rooted in Chilean society and educational system eroded her teacher agency professional identity, and emotions. These negative impacts led to teacher burnout, low self-esteem, and career despair before leaving the ELT industry, unfortunately. Despite the alarming challenges and hard truths exposed in the current landscapes of Chilean ELT and initial teacher education (ITE), Diego and Mauro shed light on how Eurocentric and Anglophone hegemonies can be contested through a decolonial and humanizing model by harnessing self-determination theory (SDT) and PP. The insights from SDT and PP pave the way for the six core elements in a model they propose to transform ITE practices and policies. These include foregrounding teacher wellbeing, resilience, empathy, marginalized voices and Indigenous experiences whilst empowering pre-service ELT teachers to critically reflect and resist the colonial power imposed on them, thus developing a decolonial mindset and restoring teacher agency and identity.

The last chapter in the volume, "**Beyond Silence: Queer Inclusion and Affirmation in Vietnamese ELT through Narrative Reflection"** by Mai Phuc Thinh, explores how

narrative inquiry can illuminate and humanize the lived experiences of queer students and teachers in Vietnam's ELT contexts. Mai committedly engages in compiling and reflecting on narratives from four participants: a closeted rural teacher, a nonbinary student finding voice through reflective writing, an urban educator embracing inclusive storytelling, and a trans learner reclaiming identity in a private center. Besides revealing the marginalization of these voices, the chapter shows participants' narratives lend themselves to be the basis for an inclusive pedagogy that embraces not only content modification or curriculum supplementation, but a robust relational practice rooted in empathy, affirmation, and ethical care. Against the adversity of institutional silence and moral conservatism, these narratives, as Mai notes at the end of the chapter, help in the "co-construction of supportive, courageous learning spaces where all identities are seen, valued, and allowed to flourish". The chapter opens our eyes to how gender diversity is dealt with in ELT, particularly in the context of Vietnam.

We wrap up this volume with an Afterword, which offers a dialogic and reflexive space for the editors to collectively envisage future pathways for ELT at the intersection of decoloniality and PP. Through a relational conversation grounded in our transnational and differently situated experiences, the Afterword moves beyond critique to foreground healing, care, critical love, and hope as necessary ethical and pedagogical orientations in times marked by epistemic fatigue, global precarity, and escalating conflict. In doing so, it reframes ELT not merely as a site of resistance to colonial and neoliberal structures, but as a healing space for collective repair, relational accountability, and the cultivation of more just, humane, and liveable educational futures.

Concluding remarks

All in all, the voices behind these narratives we have compiled tell of a field that is bursting with energies and optimism to put forth a humanizing agenda of lovingness, hope, healing, and epistemological revisions. In the interstices of the collocation of PP and decoloniality in ELT, we hear voices that look for reimagining the human interactions that emerge in language learning and teaching as happening in a loving, empathetic, and caring landscape of socio emotional justice. All these voices, we feel, reclaim a humanizing place for language teaching and learning, humanism that has also been recently proclaimed as one of the four pillars to advance second language acquisition and learning by Zheng et al (2025): "the human injustices of coloniality plague language learning and teaching. They structure language quite literally, and not just metaphorically. This is why we need a decolonial SLA/T" (p. 76).

As we move forward, it is essential to continue advocating for decolonial and humanizing approaches in ELT. This involves not only critiquing and deconstructing oppressive systems, but also actively working toward creating educational (and loving) spaces that are compassionate, inclusive, and just. By embracing the principles of love, hope, healing, and resilience, educators can contribute to the development of a more equitable and humane educational landscape.

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PART I

Decolonial Frameworks and Critical Transformation in English Language Education

CHAPTER 2

Küme Mogen as Positive and Decolonial Intercultural Principle in the Mapuche Culture: A Con-versation[1] with Elisa Loncon

Miguel Farías & Elisa Loncon

Abstract

This chapter introduces the topic of decoloniality and some positive psychology concepts as seen from the perspective of the Chilean Indigenous Mapuche community and how they may be incorporated in education and language learning. Conversations and textual exchanges between the authors are used to unpack what we understand to be the fertile grounds that decoloniality and positive psychology offer these days for language education. As an Indigenous Mapuche educator and activist, Elisa contributes with her thorough knowledge of the Mapuche cosmogony, organized in the ten dimensions of the Flower of Knowledge. In turn, Miguel poses prompting questions,

[1]We acknowledge the Latin etymology of the word: con (with, together) and versare (to turn), thus, we "turn together" around some key concepts of the Mapuche culture in this virtual and face-to-face exchange.

contextualizes, and references the field of decoloniality and positive psychology in language education, thus highlighting the socio-political and cultural relevance of key Mapuche concepts.

Keywords: decoloniality, Mapuche, love, Chilean language education

Introduction

Elisa Loncon is my colleague at work, a linguist, and fellow social struggler; she was born in a traditional community in southern Chile and belongs to the Mapuche people. Elisa is a mapuzungun[2] speaker, teacher of English, learned Spanish when she started formal schooling, and has a master's degree in linguistics and two doctorates. She became known internationally when she was elected president of the Constitutional Convention that was convened to draft a new constitution for Chile in 2021, though later not approved by popular vote. In this chapter, we engage in a conversation around the meanings of love, healing, and hope in her native language, *mapuzungun*, and the implications we see in including them as frames for language teaching and learning.

Of particular interest for this conversation is the discussion around the concept of *kümemogen* (good living) as a principle that structures the mapuche Indigenous philosophy of life on Earth where one of its components is *mapuzungun*, the language of the Earth, that is shared among human beings and all other beings that inhabit the planet. *Kümemogen*, from a Western positive psychology perspective, represents balance and interrelatedness among the various social, affective, spiritual,

[2] Mapuzungun means language of the land, also known as *chedungun*, the name of the language spoken by the Mapuche.

intellectual, natural, and psychological dimensions of life. As shown in Figure 1 below, in Loncon (2023) she calls the diagram that includes the ten dimensions of *Kümemogen* as the flower of the Mapuche *kimün* 'mapuche knowledge'. Another concept included in our conversation is *epew* (storytelling), a Mapuche ancestral practice that can be used as a teaching method by which hope and love can be tapped when sharing stories. These concepts constitute a larger approach to English language teaching and learning in that they provide an educational philosophy that can engage a variety of pedagogical classroom activities, as for example the use of eco-journals[3] to register environmental literacy tasks (Farias & Glas, 2024; Glas & Farias, 2025) highlight innovative approaches such as the mapping of the school's community sociosemiotic landscape to foster crosslinguistic and cultural awareness. Rather than regurgitating grammatical rules from an imported commercial textbook, these activities become transformative practices grounded in the learners' meaning-making constructions.

Even though we wanted this to be a face-to-face conversation, we had little time to get together, so we also exchanged ideas via email. Let me start with a short story: On a winter afternoon in 2019, I was leaving campus a bit tired and depressed after a day of tedious meetings when I ran into my colleague Elisa Loncon. I told her how I felt. She listened attentively and told me that I needed to rest; same as the Earth and its natural ecosystems rest during the winter months, we, as part of nature, have to stop our daily busy routine to look around and see how the trees and plants go to sleep to prepare for a new

[3] A writing task implemented in courses on Eco-literacy at Universidad de Santiago in which students record activities like mapping environmental problems in the community, ecological everyday practices, etc.

cycle of life. Rationally, I had read and watched videos on the Indigenous conceptions of the seasons, but listening to her, in that particular context, made a lot of sense. This was embodied meaning that I have kept in memory since then.

This chapter includes several conversational exchanges with Elisa both in person and via email that delves around some questions that attempt to approach the topics of this volume; that is, the fertile grounds that decoloniality and positive psychology offer these days for language education. I was particularly interested in talking to Elisa about this topic given both her political work on Indigenous linguistic rights (we organized a symposium about this topic some years ago) and her experience as a teacher of English and Mapuche educator. We had already talked about how in the past, the colonizing powers banned, vilified and violently repressed the ways of living of Indigenous peoples so that now we see the decolonial project as a practice to reposition the memory, culture, language, and philosophy of the Indigenous peoples, which centers around the defense of people's and nature's lives.

The locus of enunciation of this text is complex, ubiquitous, and polyphonic. Several voices resonate to answer the call for chapters for our book, in different languages that finally crystallize in English. Transmitting in Spanish and English the nuances, tones, and senses ingrained in the language of the Mapuche was not easy for Elisa. Nor was it easy for me to understand and translate those meanings codified in Spanish to English. Two colonial, logocentric and imperialistic languages attempting to understand a language with an oral tradition that conceives language and knowledge as deeply rooted in nature.

Thus, the conceptual umbrella that frames this chapter comprises decoloniality, positive psychology and Mapuche

philosophy, and how they engage in dialog in the field of (English) language education.

Theoretical underpinnings

Decoloniality

Decoloniality has been now for some years present in the intellectual landscape of the Global South as critical positionings contest the legacy of the hegemonic Global North. The sociologist Aníbal Quijano is said to have coined the term "decoloniality", and other decolonial thinkers in the Global South include Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Arturo Escobar, María Lugones, and Gloria Anzaldua (Fandiño-Parra, 2021). Mignolo (2007) defines decolonization as “a critical response to colonization, and a propositional stance to epistemic, Eurocentric, and hegemonic deconstruction that is only achieved through a thought that exercises disobedience, both politically and epistemically” (p. 194, as quoted by Fandiño Parra, 2021, along other definitions of decolonization). Fandiño-Parra (2021) from Colombia follows Mignolo in the need for a grammar of decoloniality that would enable new meanings in ELT education and that include three decolonial efforts for ELT professionals to question the ways colonialism has constructed their conceptualizations: spaces of speech, flattened hierarchy, and teacher agency (p. 176). Guerrero et al. (2022) in introducing *Ikala*’s special issue on Decoloniality in ELT mention the connections between decoloniality and southern thinking that interrogate “how Eurocentered modern/colonial rationality attempts to erase difference, homogenize ways of knowing, and produce similarities in a violent process of silencing and diminishing some subjectivities while promoting others as universal” (p. 590). This silencing, as has been mentioned and

here ratified by Elisa, has primarily affected Indigenous groups in the Americas, particularly through the imposition of colonizing languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese). In this respect, Sefa Dei and Cacciavillani (2024) recognize that "decolonization is a complex and nuanced process, encompassing Indigenous teachings of relationality, sharing, reciprocity, collective responsibility, mutual interdependence, community building, ethics, responsibility, and accountability" (p. 210).

We here engage in dialog concepts from positive psychology, decolonial thinking and the Mapuche culture. Politically, the Mapuche have known and suffered from the colonial matrix since their territory was colonized and usurped by the Spanish invaders from 1553 up to 1810 during the Arauco War, then from the so called "Ocupación de la Araucanía" carried out by the Chilean State (Correa, 2021). In the Chilean political tradition, the contact zone between Indigenous communities and the nation state has generated a wealth of policies, treaties, initiatives, and projects that seem insufficient to create a harmonious and balanced relationship. The Chilean State does not recognize Mapuche as an aboriginal nation, there is no constitutional recognition, and Mapuche are the poorest people in Chile. Indigenous knowledge and culture belong to another ontology that recognizes the relationship between culture and land, respects nature and people, and recognizes the spirituality of people and the collective relationship between people. Attempts to decolonize education include anticolonizing and Indigenizing the curriculum to create inclusive, equitable, and anticolonial learning environments centered on Indigenous knowledge (Sefa Dei & Cacciavillani, 2024).

Positive Psychology

In the psychology of learning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), particularly in proposals coming from the field of Second language acquisition (SLA) (MacIntyre, Gregersen & Mercer, 2019), a turn toward integrating positive aspects in language learning (Gregersen, 2022) has opened the gate to explore how, for example, hope, love, resilience, and healing participate in language learning and humanize it. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) assert that *positive psychology* is "a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions [that] promises to improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless" (p. 5). In foreign language learning, Zhipeng *et al.* (2024) studied the concept of enjoyment concluding that the themes in the 118 studies reviewed show "a heavy focus on adult English as a foreign language (EFL) learners whose first languages are Chinese or Persian within traditional classroom learning settings; strong preference for quantitative methods; and a prominent focus on enjoyment's antecedents and effects" (n/p).When introducing the theme of positive psychology in the special issue of the *American Psychologist* in 2000, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi identified three main topics in the 15 contributions included: first, the (hedonic) nature of what concerns the positive experience (well-being, happiness, subjective optimism); secondly, what constitutes the positive personality (i.e., "human beings as self-organizing, self-directed and adaptive entities", p. 9); and third, the recognition that experiences and individuals are immersed in social contexts. More importantly, we concur with Mercer and Gregersen (2023) when they assert that the frame of positive psychology in language education can also embrace the tenets of critical

pedagogy and social justice to more holistically understand language learning as a transformative practice (Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux would say transformative pedagogy). This transformative positive psychology would include not only individual (cognitive) variables as has been traditional in the field of additional languages learning, but also the social context: "both the psychological subjective and the sociopolitical must be understood in their relation to one another in the present and as they develop over time" (Mercer & Gregersen, 2023, p. 3). The sociopolitical contextual dimension has been hard to include in Chilean ELT as the field still follows models of communicative competence that privilege learning as individualistic and mental.

However, as Elisa and I engage in reflecting how the conceptual framework of positive psychology may be used to understand concepts from the Mapuche culture, we need to be cautious when making that association. Marecek and Cristopher (2017) suggest that positive psychology, like much of mainstream psychology, is based on assumptions about the self that are rooted in the philosophical, humanistic and religious traditions of Western thought, and more immediately, in the cultural preoccupations of middle-class US citizens. These assumptions may limit the applicability and relevance of positive psychology in cultural contexts other than Western and introduce due caveats in the interpretations we may here arrive.

Besides the proposal by Mercer and Gregersen (2023) to integrate both individual and sociopolitical factors in what they term as transformative positive psychology, the connection between the positive psychology framework and Indigenous cultures has been pointed out by ecological research in the humanities, particularly ecocriticism (Casals & Chiuminato, 2019) and ecoliteracy (Glas & Farias, 2024). It has been found

that possible elements, approaches, and strategies to face the ecological crisis caused by Anthropocene intervention in the natural order of the planet are present in the Indigenous relation with nature embodied in their culture. As an example, in the Mapuche culture, the relationship among all living beings with nature is expressed in concepts such as *küme mogen* (see Fig. 1 below). Elisa mentions that in the Mapuche culture knowledge is not only an intellectual action, but also involves the earth, dreams, and spirit.

As for the concept of hope, it is interesting that in sociolinguistics there is also a turn toward integrating hope as situated action in language production. Silva and Borba (2024), in introducing the special issue of *Language and Society* and drawing on Ernst Bloch's Marxist materialist understanding of hope, declare that hope is an active, cooperative process rather than passive waiting. They emphasize that hope is contextually produced through language and social practices, particularly in communities facing oppression and precarity. They also quote Freire and his concept of "esperançar" in Brazilian Portuguese, which frames hope as pragmatic and reflexive action rather than mere waiting. For the purposes of this chapter, a key issue in Silva and Borba (2024) is that hope requires a pedagogy to be learned as a “teachable affect” (p. 776) and, thus, we could integrate it (under this teachability premise) to the other concepts that applications of positive psychology to language learning have discussed. As the Brazilian authors mention, “subjects very often navigate layers of oppression and precarity by building cooperation, reimagining semiotic resources, and fathoming livable forms of life against the grain of debilitating conditions” (p. 777). This situates hope, then, as a space of possibility; a space that is open in the exploration of some key

concepts in the Mapuche culture that I here discuss with Elisa Loncon.

Our Conversations

To guide our critical conversation, I prepared a few questions but others emerged as the conversations unfolded (MF: Miguel Farías; EL: Elisa Loncon):

MF: Elisa, given your Indigenous background I was wondering whether there is an idealization of the Mapuche culture as a pure and uncontaminated expression of their traditions?

EL: Good question, Miguel. I think the opinion depends on the interlocutor. There are some who judge the new things practiced by the Mapuche as something not Mapuche, not pure, because, for unknown reason, it is assumed to be traditional. However, the Mapuche are strategic and innovative, as they have been through history. There is a very important reference in this: Leftraru (Lautaro, in its Spanish version) domesticated the horse and then used it to fight in defense of his people against the Spaniards. Elicura Chihuailaf, first Mapuche to win the National Literature Prize in 2020, has maintained the same when he affirms that the Mapuche should assume writing strategically as Leftraru did with the horse.

MF: Yes. Speaking of writing, it is interesting that you have brought to our discussion the work of Hernández-Avila (2025) who claims that Elicura Chihuailaf and Lee Maracle (from the Canadian Sto:lo Indigenous group) are the only two indigenous writers to address directly the nation-states of Chile and Canada, respectively. In their Indigenous rhetoric, according to

Hernández-Avila (2025), both authors stand in "defense of their people's ways of knowing and being in the face of neo-colonialism" (p. 233).

EL: Yes, that's a recent reference to put the work of Elicura in perspective. The truth is that the Mapuche culture is no exception; like all cultures, it undergoes changes, maintaining its philosophy, values, and practices (Loncon, 2019); however, because of colonization, it has also undergone undesired changes, not voluntary, such as the abandonment of its lands and language. However, as I have mentioned elsewhere, "there should be language policies to guarantee the linguistic rights and such Chilean policies should include the languages and cultures of the indigenous peoples" (Loncon 2010, p. 93). What does not change is the episteme of Indigenous cultures, the way of looking at and seeing the world, which is transferred in social everyday practices in the community, in the ceremonies, the singing; whoever does not know them is because they have suffered from the dispossession and have not had a meaningful experience to recover it.

MF: Well put Elisa!!! So, it is this epistemic component, this understanding, what could be included in language teaching by pedagogically incorporating the key concepts we are here discussing. On the other hand, there are also stereotypes of the Indigenous communities. Saiz et al (2018) found positive and negative stereotypes about the Mapuche in a sample of university students who ratified the findings of Saiz (1991) and added two new unfavorable stereotypes. The stereotypes that were confirmed were "responsible, loyal, honest, honest, intelligent" (i.e., noble and industrious people), and the negative ones were

“stubborn, violent, distrustful” (i.e., hostile Indians) (p. 34). The new negative stereotypes that emerged are terrorists and unfairly privileged.

EL: Negative stereotypes toward the Mapuche such as lazy, warriors, macho and others are the product of historical processes of colonization, structural racism and cultural ignorance that have persisted and have been normalized in some sectors of society. For example, the ‘lazy’ stereotype comes from the belief that the Mapuche do not work on the land: This is based on a Eurocentric perspective that values work according to the norms of industrial capitalism, ignoring traditional Mapuche ways of living. The Mapuche work like everyone else; they do not exploit all the land because they have to let it rest and farming is an activity that is in balance with nature and the needs of the community. This prejudice (i.e., the lazy Mapuche) was reinforced by the colonial narrative that sought to justify the usurpation of land under the idea that it was “unproductive land”.

Today the Mapuche are accused of being terrorists and warriors. This stereotype is a political construct that criminalizes the legitimate defense of the territory and rights of native peoples against the expansion of corporate and state interests. The Mapuche struggle for the recognition of their territorial rights is a response to centuries of dispossession and structural violence and to associate directly these resistances with “terrorism” delegitimizes the demands and contributes to media stigmatization, serving political and economic interests that seek to avoid discussions on historical reparations.

MF: I remember doing some work on stereotyping, understood as a cultural process by which one group highlights salient features (usually negative ones) of the others as a way to assure in-group cohesiveness. When stereotypes are used to denigrate, ban or delegitimize others, we have discrimination.

EL: Yes, for example, Chileans say that Mapuche are machista. As in all cultures, there are macho, sexist attitudes, but this generalization makes invisible the dynamics of the Mapuche culture, where women have fundamental roles. Mapuche women have historically been part of the original authorities and have been owners of their decisions; they are also fundamental pillars in the preservation of the language (mapudungun), traditions and spirituality. Actors such as the *machi* (medicine person*)* or the *werken* (spokeswomen) show that women are protagonists in the political and spiritual structures of the Mapuche culture.

These negative stereotypes not only dehumanize the Mapuche, but also perpetuate exclusion and racism, limiting the path towards a more inclusive and just society. Particularly in education, it is necessary to promote knowledge about the Mapuche philosophy, history and struggle that can debunk prejudices based on ignorance. This includes making visible the Mapuche history and voices that build communities and contribute to society. It is also necessary to understand that there is no single "Mapuche being"; experiences and ways of life are diverse and do not fit into generalizations.

MF: Moving on into some key concepts in the Mapuche culture and their possible application to language learning, how can the concept of *pewma* (dream) be used in ELT?

EL: *Pewma* is the dream, a practice that allows for the self-knowledge of the person, the knowledge of our spiritual origin, of our innate abilities. It can also predict facts or teach a certain knowledge, like the dreams experienced by the *machi* or shaman. As all knowledge, it is learned and achieved with practice; and in the Mapuche culture the dream has a space and role throughout the developmental growth of children (Loncon, 2023).

'How can it be used?' Good question. The knowledge of English in Chilean students is a knowledge that will allow them to know another language, another culture, other worlds. Learning the practice of dreaming is also an intercultural skill, which will enrich the intercultural experience with a culture rooted in its own history, because we must recognize that the roots of Chile are also Mapuche. On the other hand, dreaming is a spiritual practice, and human beings are individuals that possess a spirit; however, the knowledge coming from science leaves this in the hands of the individual. To experience spirituality as a human being makes us more complete, less repressed, constitutes us as transcendental human beings, and allows us to feel life lighter, more complete, and happier. To dream, to understand dreams, takes away anguish and provides a sense of being because they tell you about yourself, your ancestors or something for you in the future. With no doubt, when we find those answers we are happier.

MF: Yes, and politically, Elicura Chihuailaf (1999) mentions that his dream and hope in the message he writes to Chileans "could constitute a minimal contribution for the beginning of the much

needed and urgent dialog between Mapuche and Chileans" (p. 39).

EL: Totally agree. Remember that the dream has also been present in the history of great leaders; Abraham Lincoln, for example, dreamed his death, and without going any further, the recent Nobel Prize in literature, the South Korean writer Han Kang, writes dreams in her novels, which gives values to dreams. Then, why would students not learn about this topic? Those stories show you the importance of dreams: if you believe and practice the experience of dream. It represents other epistemes in ancient culture and their people.

MF: And remember that, metaphorically, Martin Luther King also had a dream where he envisioned a more just society for the US. As you mentioned, Elisa, the epistemological dimension represents a core or kernel component of the Mapuche culture, and myths seem to be part of those stories or *epew* (stories) that transmit that episteme. Joseph Campbell (1988) in a book that transcribes his conversations with Bill Moyers, defined myths as "clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life" (p. 5). Campbell earlier on in the conversation has also responded to the question about myths saying that "one of the problems today is that we are not well acquainted with the literature of the spirit" (p. 3). Now that you mentioned Elicura Chihuailaf (1999), he writes that besides *pewma* (dreams), another important reference for the Mapuche identity is the duality represented in the *epew* or myths of Txeg Txeg and Kay Kay that are part of the founding myths of the world (p. 45). In this respect, how would you use the stories of Treng Treng and Kay Kay in ELT?

EL: Yes, they are two foundational epews about the great flood—something like the Mapuche version of that event experienced by humanity and present in all ancient cultures. In the Mapuche case, it deals with the struggle between two great serpents: one represents good and the other evil. **Kay Kay** is the serpent that causes the rain, and **Txeg Txeg** is the serpent that makes a hill rise as it rains, where the people and animals who survive the flood are secured. This story serves to show that, no matter how different or distant cultures may be, they have all experienced the great cataclysms that humanity has lived through. The great flood is a real event in the history of the Earth, and most ancient cultures have records of what happened.

MF: So, it is by means of these epews (stories) that you can create intercultural awareness by comparing and contrasting the founding myths and stories of different groups around the world. The integration of this literature about founding stories in the language classroom points in the direction of one of the objectives of language teaching in Chile, which is intercultural competences. With the rise of immigration in Chile, this is a good opportunity to get to know the cultural dynamics that can emerge in classrooms with learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Riquelme-Sanderson and Torrico Avila (2023) in their proposal for the teaching of English in Chile as a means for the revitalization of the Chilean indigenous languages assert that this involves that ELT develop intercultural competences but also serves as dialogical bridge among cultures through teaching strategies and decolonizing pedagogies. These intercultural relations would apply to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

EL: Sure thing. Going back to your question, Miguel, in my experience I have integrated Txeg txeg[4] and Kay Kay as inter and crosscultural knowledge present in all ancient cultures. These stories establish a dialogue with the past in the life of human beings, with the universal flood, with the flood present in the *Popol Vuh*, for example. On the other hand, the story of the Txeg txeg addresses the issue of human imbalance with nature, a permanent principle of life that, when lost, puts the life of nature at risk. The story also uses the dream as a source of knowledge and describes zoomorphic-human beings that climbed so high that to return they flew like birds or returned through the waters like fish. For ELT in Chile (and elsewhere), asking students from different cultural backgrounds to share these type of stories would promote intercultural awareness and the recognition of the other as legitimate other in the conversation.

MF: Moving on to the field of language teaching and education, in your opinion, apart from the ones we have mentioned thus far, what are other key concepts that can be used in a first approach to introduce the Mapuche culture in ELT?

EL: In language teaching and learning, the concept of the zugun (as in *mapuzungun*, the name for the language of the Mapuche), means the word, especially in its ethical dimension. It is a culture that respects the word, it should not be violated; you are taught to carry, to deliver, and to bring the word. The word is one of the main means for learning and wisdom. The word is also shared with other non-human and spiritual beings that inhabit nature.

[4] Elisa uses a spelling that is more phonetic to represent her pronunciation of some words.

MF: So, again, students can share their own conceptions of language (provided there are students from different linguistic backgrounds) as a strategy to develop metalinguistic awareness to aid their language learning process.

EL: Yes, or explicitly teach it so that they can compare. Another related concept that can be introduced is the practice of naming. The Mapuche name refers to the same being from the earth, including sun, moon, animals, natural phenomenon such as wind, volcano, rain, etc. Names consist of two elements: the first one is familiar and territorial and the second provides specificity to the identity. We refer to a name as *küga* or *kümpen*, both words connect the person with nature, history and personal abilities. For example, *gürü* 'fox', so there is *anügüru*, 'sitting fox', *kurugürü* 'black fox', etc. When the Mapuche births started to be officially recorded in the national civil registry, this led to the loss of this practice; however, the naming system remains and it is possible to revitalize it, for example, by adopting an element of nature in the individual identity, a practice to encourage the reconnection of the human being with nature. In community mapping activities learners can explore, for example, the meanings of names for streets, rivers, people, mountains.

MF: As we mentioned in the presentation of this conversation, Indigenous cultures have gained salience in the discussion of topics in ecocriticism (Casals & Chiuminato, 2019) and ecoliteracy (Glas & Farias, 2024), particularly the themes dealing with the relation between human beings and nature, whether we look at it from an egocentric perspective in which human beings are at the top of the pyramid and thus see themselves as owners

of the natural resources, or from an ecocentric view that places human beings as part of nature. According to Chihuailaf (1999), *Itrofill Mogen* can be translated in today's scientific terms as biodiversity, following its etymological three roots: *itro*, meaning the totality without exclusion; *fil*, integrity without fractioning; and *mogen*, life and the living world (p. 50). How can the concept of *Itrofill Mogen* be applied for environmental education in ELT?

EL: The National Curriculum guidelines for teaching English incorporate care for nature and intercultural practices in society. The *itxofill mogen*[5] – 'all lives interconnected' (See Fig. 1) – teaches us to live in horizontality, respect, and value human and non-human lives, so to achieve the objectives of valuing mother earth, the paradigm of *itxofill mogen* makes it possible. In addition, the practice of Indigenous values and knowledge can be approached with intercultural didactics, of dialogue between cultures because valuing nature implies seeing the non-human as beings necessary for life, without the arrogance of the anthropocentric culture. Addressing environmental problems goes beyond incorporating ecological principles of not polluting, but of coexisting with respect and interdependence with other beings that inhabit the earth beyond the human species.
The *itxofill mogen* is also a practice of living with the family, natural and neighborhood environments. Each of us should be aware that we have to maintain life and for this to happen it is necessary to protect the *itxofil lmogen* and to practice the *küme mogen*. Ixofill Mogen recognizes all forms of life—human, non-human, and spiritual—existing on Earth. All are part of the Earth; the Earth is alive, it has its own existence, and it is the foundation

[5] See footnote 2

that allows life to continue. *Ixofill Mogen* is a pillar of Mapuche philosophy, complementary to *Nor Mogen* (rules and protocols of behavior), *Az Mogen* (knowledge and values), and *Küme Mogen* (living well); all of these are part of the philosophy of *Azmapu*. This concept can be included in ELT by comparing eco and ego centric paradigms in field trips.

MF: In this respect, Elisa, Bacquet (2021) introduces the Indigenous perspective in his proposal for a framework to decolonize classroom practices. He quotes Ortiz (2007) that sees *Kimün* as "an interconnected body of knowledge in which the concrete and the metaphysical form a holistic whole" (p. 19). And further on, Bacquet refers to Ñanculef (2016) who describes *Kimün* as knowing through direct observation and passing that knowledge on through metaphors. Bacquet (2021) claims that even though this worldview has been historically neglected and denied, it provides "a way of relating to nature…approaching knowledge…and relating to one another and our social groups that promotes a sense of union and oneness rather than separatedness" (p. 19).

Now, from a sociolinguistic perspective (and having in mind that Willliam Labov, the founding scholar of modern sociolinguistics, passed away a few weeks ago), how is diversity understood among the groups that constitute the Mapuche nation (lafkenche, pehuenches, huilliches)?

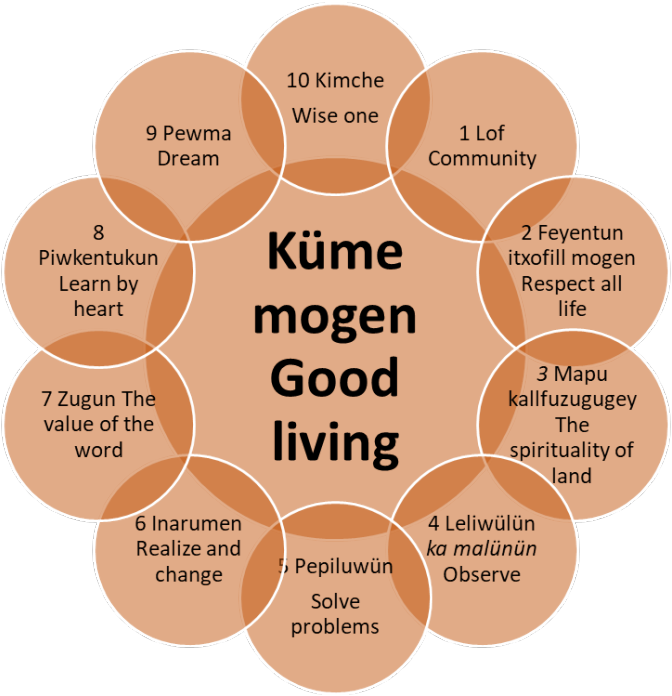
EL: Diversity is territorial, the mapu is diverse and its children are diverse. It is not the same to recognize oneself as being linked to the energies and spirituality of the sea than to the mountain range or the rivers. The territorial belonging is fundamental to

define the condition of the human being; the sea has spiritual possessions that define the identity of the Lafkenche, as can the rivers, the hills or the animals that are nearby and live there. In the Mapuche culture, its coexistence with the land is territorial, and in the Mapuche philosophy, diversity is respected, and it is part of the *itxofill mogen*, all lives. The language also varies by codifying different lexicons, by naming elements proper to the territory and that do not exist in other places. For example, the Mapuche Lafkenche, from the sea, recognizes different types of fish and name them, a lexical richness that the Pewenche does not have; however, they can recognize different trees and their fruits because they live in the mountains. The language not only varies lexically but also in expressions, pronunciation, and intonation. The change that hinders the understanding of the language is the loss of morphology, object morphemes, dual and important sounds of the language, as a result of the Spanishization (Loncon, 2011).

MF: The iconography that Indigenous peoples have produced along their ancestral history vividly and succinctly represents the cosmogony that frames their social, political and religious vision of the world. To illustrate this point with another Chilean Indigenous group, the Aymarás that live in the north Andean region of Chile have the ChaKana Cross that organizes the relations between the human world and the cosmos; *chakana* meaning "bridge or stairway to heaven" in Aymara (Giovanetti y Silva, 2020).

What can you say about the meaning of Küme Mogen, which you have illustrated using the following diagram (Fig. 1), and how can it be introduced into language teaching?

Figure 1. *The Mapuche Flower of Kimün (adapted from Loncon, 2023, p. 74)*



The diagram in Figure 1 graphically represents in a flower the main ten dimensions of Good Living, as described below:

1. Lof The communal space where knowledge is born and cultivated.

2. Feyentun itxofill mogen Believing in and respecting all forms of life (nature, the four lands, and human, no human). Every thing is alive and interconnected.

3. Mapu kallfüzugugey Acknowledging that everything that inhabits the Earth is sacred.

4. Leliwülün ka malünün Observing and experiencing.

5. Pepiluwün Adjusting life, things, and solving problems.

6. Inarumen Becoming aware of one's own actions and those of others. Changing when necessary (the Western scientific method is present in the Mapuche knowledge paradigm).

7. Zugun The word as an instrument of knowledge is an ethical word that does not admit violation.

8. Piwkentukun Learning with and from the heart. The heart aids learning: one learns what one loves.

9. Pewma 'Dream, dreaming' allows access to spiritual learning.

10. Kimchegen 'Being wise' in the greatest sense of knowledge. It involves minimally assuming all the petals of the flower. In Mapuche culture, a person can become wise, an ethical being, generous with the community, and humble before nature.

MF: Then, *Küme mogen* encompasses in its ten dimensions the positive and decolonial principles from the Mapuche culture that we wanted to introduce in this chapter. It provides a hopeful and transformative horizon for the discussion of the role of second/additional languages in pushing forth a positive and decolonial agenda.

Final remarks

No doubt, the Mapuche culture has a lot to offer to the field of language education, particularly in Chile. Their vision of nature,

society, and all manifestations of life as interconnected is a perspective that brings to the fore the need for care and restoration in the face of the present worldwide ecological crisis. The paths to integrate the Mapuche culture to language education that Elisa has shared are groundbreaking in that they motivate language learners to explore the potentialities of the language to understand the world and, most importantly, to construct our individual and social positionings.

Each one of the concepts she has discussed can be placed at the crossroads of decolonial theories and positive psychology engagements so that, on one hand, a critical view can emerge to understand the dispossession and discrimination that Mapuche have faced historically. On the other hand, criticality gives way to hope, love, and care as we explore the delicate and subtle underpinnings of a cosmovision that is supported by ecocentric tenets as shown in the Mapuche flower of Kimun. Nonetheless, we need to be aware that "merely incorporating specific aspects of Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum without addressing power dynamics at the structural level risks reinforcing the status quo" (Sefa Dei & Cacciavillani, 2024, p. 221).

In a world facing an unprecedented environmental crisis, the *Küme Mogen* principle of the Mapuche philosophy of *Azmapu* offers a radical and transformative alternative. The extractivist and anthropocentric paradigm has led to the collapse of ecosystems and climate change, but the Mapuche worldview reminds us that the Earth is not an inert resource to be exploited, but a living being endowed with spirit (*Mapu Ñuke*) with which we are inextricably linked. Defending nature from this perspective is not only a matter of survival, but also an act of reciprocity and respect for those who share this world with us.

A further conversation with Elisa can include how she sees the teaching of English in Mapuche communities (and Chilean Indigenous communities in general) where Spanish has already been introduced, and this generates a trilingual-cultural scenario with languages having different functions and sociopolitical weights.

How can we learn to care for water, forests, soils and the beings that inhabit them if we ignore or marginalize the voices of those who have cohabited and guarded these spaces for generations? This call to unity is also a call to decolonize thinking, to open ourselves to the richness of Indigenous philosophies and to build bridges between diverse knowledge.

It is urgent that the peoples of the world, regardless of their cultural traditions, unite to protect the Earth as their common home. The rights of nature should not be seen as a legal fad, but as an expression of justice toward all living beings. However, as educators we ask ourselves whether educational institutions, particularly language teacher education programs, are really equipped to deal with the issues of decoloniality, transformative positive psychology and Indigenous knowledges.

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CHAPTER 3

Decoloniality as a Conductive Thread to Love and Hope

Gysele da Silva Colombo-Gomes

Abstract

Decoloniality emerged in response to the promises of modernity and the persistent realities of coloniality. Its conceptualizations and practices are multiple, relational, and rooted in people's struggles to build radically different worlds. This chapter presents findings from a project conducted at a public school in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area of a city in Rio de Janeiro State, Brazil. The study explored how a pre-service teacher, drawing on decolonial theory, implemented an English language teaching approach to foster critical consciousness among fifth-grade students. The pedagogical goal was to enable them to understand English as a lingua franca and as a means to identify, challenge, and disrupt the colonial matrix of power within English language teaching in Brazil. Results suggest that love and hope emerged as foundational pedagogical forces, cultivated through the co-construction of valid knowledge grounded in practice, ethics, and the agency of social actors.

Keywords: love, hope, decoloniality, ELT

Introduction

In recent years, issues of decoloniality and emotions have garnered increasing attention in Brazil, particularly within the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), due to their growing relevance in education. These themes may be directly connected to Paulo Freire's (1984; 1994; 1998; 2001; 1987/2005) work for two key reasons. Long before decoloniality became a widely discussed concept, Freire's work exposed colonial power structures in education—particularly through his critique of the banking model, where learners passively receive knowledge, reinforcing colonial logics. Second, his pedagogy emphasizes that emotions are not peripheral to learning but constitute legitimate epistemologies, especially in contexts marked by oppression, exclusion, and linguistic injustice.

Inspired by Freire's work and grounded in decolonial perspectives, I have been coordinating a project entitled "Multiculturalism and Critical Multilingualism in the Teaching of English to Children" (MCMTEC), registered under UERJ[6]'s code number 187727317823, since 2022, in my role as an associate professor of English at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This initiative is designed to prepare pre-service teachers (PSTs) from the outset of their undergraduate studies to face the challenges of their future profession. The project enables PSTs to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world pedagogical practice, particularly in the context of teaching English as a lingua franca (ELF).

Located in South America, Brazil shares borders with seven Spanish-speaking countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia,

[6] UERJ – Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro – Rio de Janeiro State University.

Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela). Nevertheless, the country prioritizes English over Spanish, primarily because Brazil's National Common Curricular Base (BNCC)[7] recognizes only English as a mandatory foreign language. This decision reignites discussions on linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) which is referred as an idea of the impact the diffusion of English has had around the world as an instrument of colonialism by the British Empire and then, by the United States. Written in the early 1990s, Phillipson's (1992) work exposes the dynamics of power embedded in the English language and its teaching, revealing how they perpetuate unequal North-South relations. Additionally, Phillipson's study (1992) inspires alternative approaches (Giroux & McLaren, 1997) to language pedagogy, aiming to transform these power structures into frameworks that foster respect, inclusivity, and dignity for individuals across both hemispheres.

Kress (2010) posits that the English language has functioned as a vector for disseminating dominant ideologies, including those related to the market, the state, the family, and individual identity. In Brazil's multilayered society, marked by socio-economic and cultural inequalities, these ideologies become further entrenched—often leading learners from marginalized areas and under-resourced schools to feel inferior and incapable of learning. By reflecting over these matters, I was led to unsettling questions, such as: Is English a tool of oppression or a vehicle of opportunity for poor Brazilian

[7] BNCC is Brazil's National Common Curricular Base, a normative document that defines the essential learning objectives and competencies that all students must develop at each stage of Basic Education (Early Childhood Education, Elementary School, and High School). It was implemented in 2018. Before that, Spanish and English were foreign languages in the BNCC.

children? What kind of pedagogy can give children hope to learn and profit from knowledge? How do decoloniality and the pedagogy of love and hope intersect to help learners perceive the English language as connected to their realities?

The questions above are concerns of this case study, which explores the experiences of a pre-service English teacher participating in MCMTEC, a project conducted at a public school located in a socioeconomically vulnerable area in São Gonçalo, a city in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Through content analysis (Bardin, 2011) of the participant's multimodal narratives, this study explores the intersections of ELT, social inequality, and decolonial practices grounded in Freire's revolutionary pedagogy of love (Freire, 1987/ 2005) and hope as an alternative approach to language pedagogy in a marginalized context.

In the following sections, I first briefly describe the Brazilian educational system and the role of English in Brazilian contexts. Next, I review the intersections of decoloniality with affective dimensions, focusing on the transformative potential of love and hope as sites of resistance. Then, I provide an overview of this case study—its context (MCMTEC), the participant, data collection, analysis, and findings. Finally, I conclude with reflections on the study.

Brazilian Educational System and the Role of English in Basic Education

Education and English language education in Brazil are highly contentious topics, reflecting the country's deep social inequalities. The Brazilian education system is sharply divided between public and private institutions, which differ significantly in terms of funding, quality, accessibility, and structure. Public

schools are government-funded (at the federal, state, or municipal levels) but frequently suffer from budget shortages, leading to inadequate infrastructure and limited resources. In contrast, private schools rely on tuition fees paid by families and are managed by private entities—such as religious organizations, corporations, or independent owners—which typically ensures better funding, superior facilities, greater access to technology, and higher teacher salaries.

In terms of academic performance, public schools—except for selective federal institutes and military schools—often struggle with overcrowded classrooms, teacher strikes, material shortages, and high dropout rates, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions. Private schools, meanwhile, tend to achieve higher scores on university entrance exams and frequently emphasize college preparation, including bilingual programs.

Approximately 80% of Brazilian students attend public schools, most of whom come from low-income backgrounds[8]. For marginalized communities, these schools are often the only available option. However, public school teachers—despite having job stability as civil servants—face low wages and poor working conditions, contributing to frequent strikes and high turnover. Private schools, on the other hand, cater primarily to middle- and upper-class families and are widely perceived as gateways to elite universities due to their structured curricula and consistent resources. These disparities reinforce the widespread perception that public education in Brazil is systematically failing.

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[8] Source: https://marketbrief.edweek.org/education-market/inside-brazils-huge-complex-k-12-market/2019/05?utm_source=chatgpt.com

At the university level, however, the dynamics shift. Public universities—tuition-free and prestigious—benefit from strong research funding but remain highly selective, often favoring graduates from private schools. Private universities, meanwhile, range in quality and include large for-profit chains, with many students relying on scholarships or loans to afford tuition. Very few people have access to Graduate studies, which can be Professional specialization or Academic degrees (Master's degree and Doctoral degree).

At UERJ, in the Language Department I belong to, PSTs are trained to teach in Basic Education (BE), which is a system governed by the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* (LDB - Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education). BE is structured into three main stages. The first stage, **Early Childhood Education,** is not mandatory but increasingly encouraged. It is divided into two substages: **Daycare** (ages 0–3) and **Preschool** (ages 4–5; compulsory since 2009). The second stage is subdivided into two phases: **Primary Education**, which lasts nine years and is divided into the **Initial Years** (ages 6–10, covering 1st to 5th grade) and the **Final Years** (ages 11–14, covering 6th to 9th grade); and **Secondary Education** (ages 15–17), compulsory since 2013. This three-year stage integrates general education with optional technical or professional training.

According to the BNCC, the teaching of English is a compulsory component of the curriculum starting in the 6th year of primary school, when students are typically around 11 years old. Nonetheless, in many private schools, English instruction begins as early as Early Childhood Education. In fact, ELT in Brazil encounters significant challenges, particularly in public schools, where limited access to adequate resources and

insufficient continuing teacher training hinder effective instruction. Although English is a compulsory subject from the sixth grade onward, many students fail to achieve the expected proficiency levels. A traditional overemphasis on grammar and writing—often at the expense of oral communication and practical fluency—further exacerbates the issue. Compounding these difficulties are the scarcity of appropriate teaching materials and the pronounced heterogeneity of student skill levels within classrooms.

Jordão (2023) highlights that "education has been perceived by a considerable portion of the population as a commodity—knowledge reified to be bought and sold by the few who can afford it" (Jordão, 2023, p. 2). Regarding the role of English in Brazil, Jordão claims that it is deeply intertwined with neoliberal ideologies and has been constructed as a differentiating factor in social mobility as previously described. Consequently, Brazilians are led to believe that those who can afford to study at language institutes or private schools are more likely to ascend socially. This concrete myth perpetuates the idea that only by attending these privileged and prestigious spaces, where English is effectively taught, can individuals successfully master this language. Thus, embracing decoloniality may serve as a powerful means of challenging and reducing unjust subjugation, which divides Brazil into two asymmetrical sides: a small, privileged minority and a vast population living in economic vulnerability.

Decoloniality, Love and Hope

Decolonial thinking has existed since at least the late 15th and early 16th centuries. According to Mignolo (2011) decoloniality involves delinking from Eurocentric epistemologies and the

colonial matrix of power— Mignolo uses it to describe the global system of domination that began with colonialism and continues through modernity. Mignolo argues that from that point onward, decoloniality would prevail—not as a new universal paradigm that claims to supersede all previous and future ones, but as an option. As Silva and Brocanelli (2022) point out, the decolonial movement is a broad philosophical and cultural movement that challenges the Euro-North American epistemological paradigm, which imposed itself and became hegemonic across Latin America's geocultural landscape.

In contrast, Fistarol et al. (2020) note that despite the pervasive influence of English linguistic imperialism on Brazil's ELT policies, the *BNCC* (Brazil, 2017) was designed to foster more contextualized and pluralistic language teaching. Regarding the initial education of ELT in BE, the BNCC is based on theoretical approaches such as teacher knowledge, dialogical theory of language, English as a Lingua Franca, and pedagogical practices incorporating technology into English language instruction. Moreover, the BNCC advocates for integrating English language practices with real-world applications, emphasizing critical literacy through speaking, reading, and writing—all supported by digital technologies to promote students' holistic development. Thus, teachers are expected to implement these practices cohesively, nurturing interactions between cultures, curricular components, and real-life contexts to promote students' critical education in BE by offering activities that address issues relevant to each context and that do not favor one language or culture over another. These practices should foster intercultural interactions anchored in real-world contexts, promoting critical thinking by rejecting passive absorption of knowledge - where students are positioned as passive receptacles

for knowledge deposition[9]. Such memorization-based approaches, demanding mere obedience, inherently suppress the development of critical consciousness, which is the absolute core concept in Paulo Freire's revolutionary philosophy of education and liberation.

Paulo Freire (1921–1997), born into a middle-class family in Recife, the capital of Pernambuco in Brazil's Northeast, became familiar with poverty and hunger at an early age, partly as a result of the Great Depression. He also experienced first-hand the political instability and economic hardships of the 1930s. Long before decolonial studies gained prominence, and during the years of the Brazilian military dictatorship, Freire—both as a teacher and scholar—fought against social injustice in an effort to give voice to the poor and the oppressed. According to Silva and Brocanelli (2022),

> Paulo Freire, although he never specifically considered himself a decolonial thinker, defended a movement for the liberation of people through education; he also belonged to the group referring to subaltern studies, since he heard the voice of the colonized, or rather, the oppressed, according to his own words. (Silva & Brocanelli, 2022, p. 232)

I align with Silva and Brocanelli's (2022) recognition of Freire's work and significance, particularly their claim that Freire, through his pedagogy of freedom (Freire, 1998), practices, and textual reflections, sought to develop a methodology of work and study aimed at enabling the emergence of new forms of life—forms not merely imposed by a sovereign and dominating power,

[9] 'Banking model' of education (Freire, 1970)

but rather grounded in the lived realities of those already present (p. 233). It is undeniable that Freire always desired to use education to help people in a process of literacy to achieve awareness of themselves and the society in which they live. Thus, people would overcome limits being part of society and, to a large extent, they would choose another way of life than a life of resignation (Silva & Brocanelli, 2022). I am aware that Freire's powerful initiatives were not directly related to ELT, but I see them as ways of fighting against coloniality, which I understand as a way to fight oppression and sovereignty of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992).

Bourdieu (1986) argues that dominant agents and institutions tend to inculcate prevailing cultural norms to reproduce social inequalities in areas such as language, labor, and judgment—a process that can be understood as a form of colonization. In contrast, Freire's pedagogy of freedom, love, and hope can be interpreted as a conscious effort to decolonize educational spaces. Embracing Freire's approach to ELT may represent a movement diametrically opposed to the Eurocentric and American epistemological paradigm that dominates ELT globally. This dominant paradigm aligns with a particular rationality or worldview that becomes hegemonic, colonizing and overshadowing other existing or alternative forms of knowledge and languages, as strongly criticized by Quijano (2005).

After building upon the connections between decoloniality and the pedagogy of love and hope established here, the following section will first briefly explore perspectives on love and hope as foundational emotions in educational contexts.

Love and Hope: Emotions as actions

Since the late 1990's, authors such as Nias (1996), Liu et al. (2009), Swain (2013) and Golombek (2015) have suggested a significant interdependence between cognition and emotion, which may deeply influence learning. In this study, the focus lies on love and hope.

Love

In "All about Love", bell hooks (2003) emphasizes that understanding love begins with a shared definition, acknowledging the complexity due to its various forms. She views love as a result of conscious actions, requiring effort to cultivate meaningful, trusting relationships. bell hooks critiques the tendency to define love merely as an emotion but recognizing it as an action —an active choice and commitment—enhances our capacity to love. According to her, this perspective aligns with the ideas of Erich Fromm — a German-American social psychologist— whose assertion that "love is as love does" emphasizes love as an act of will, encompassing both intention and action. In hooks's view, love is a choice and an action rather than merely a feeling. If love is an action, it demands intention, will, and deliberate choice. The same holds true in Freire's pedagogy of love, which calls for liberation from systems of power and dominance through critical engagement and solidarity. As hooks asserts, when we choose to love, we consciously nurture growth, moving away from the conventional notion that love is purely instinctual or emotional. Consequently, accountability and responsibility become inherent to the framework of love.

Considering love as an action, it is crucial to recognize that our rational actions and arguments often have an emotional foundation. This underscores the importance of understanding

that “every rational system is based on fundamental premises or notions that we accept as a starting point because we want to do so” (Maturana, 2002, p.16). Furthermore, love constitutes the dominant emotion shaping our actions, and through continuous interaction with others, it legitimizes coexistence. In this sense, interactions driven by love foster and sustain coexistence, whereas interactions rooted in aggression disrupt and weaken it (Maturana, 2002, p. 22). Enacting an approach to ELT that respects local learning demands, rather than merely exposing learners to global English language and culture, helps legitimize the coexistence of diverse cultures.

Barcelos and Coelho (2016) argue that love is an inherent part of human essence—an emotion universally experienced. Barcelos (2020) further reinforces that love is both an essential human emotion and one of our five psychological needs, expanding the discussion to its role in education. Barcelos grounds her concept of revolutionary love in two complementary perspectives: (a) the first inspired by Chabot (2008) and Lanas and Zembylas (2015) and (b) the second aligned with Paulo Freire’s notion of love as *amorosidade* (translated as *amorosity* in English). These two perspectives share three core elements—human beings, individuals, and social connections—that underscore the importance of a humanizing education. However, despite Barcelos’ meticulous analysis of the subject, it is important to highlight that long before Lanas and Zembylas argued that “love is a more powerful force than anger in promoting political change” (cf. Barcelos, 2020, p. 3), Freire ([1987] 2005) had already asserted that love should also be understood as a commitment to humanity and to the struggle for the liberation of oppressed individuals; after all, to love is to

commit oneself to the liberation of the oppressed—and the oppressor.

Hope

Freire (1994, p. 8) asserts that hope constitutes an ontological necessity and alongside love; it forms an integral part of human nature (Freire, 1994, p. 75). As such, hope can be understood as a necessary, generative force that propels human beings toward transformative action, whereas hopelessness signifies the suppression—or even the negation—of this vital impulse. Giroux and McLaren (1997) emphasize that Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization (critical consciousness) is paramount for fostering hope, dreams, and utopian thinking. Aligned with Freire's ideas, Giroux and McLaren claim that developing critical consciousness enables individuals to envision transformative possibilities and engage in actions aimed at achieving social justice. This process nurtures a hopeful outlook and the pursuit of a more equitable society, aligning with Mignolo's central concept of pluriversality—a world in which many worlds coexist—as a counterpoint to the universality imposed by colonial and Western paradigms, as dominant frameworks, theories, and practices that have shaped how English is taught around the world.

Hope in education may represent the power to struggle against the disadvantages and limitations that hinder children's social mobility. Freire argues that the belief that hope alone will transform the world, and action undertaken in such naiveté, is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism and fatalism. He strongly emphasizes that hope as an ontological need, requires practice in order to become historical concreteness. Hope is so important to our existence – both individual and social – that we

must take every care no to experience it in a mistaken form (...)" (Freire, 1994, p. 9). I remain mindful that I must proceed with hope, in alignment with Freire's words:

> In limited situations, beyond which lies "untested feasibility" alone – sometimes perceivable, sometimes not – we find the why of both positions: the hopeful one and the hopeless one. One of the tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious, correct political analysis, is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what obstacles may be. (Freire, 1994, p. 9)

The assertion above serves as the epicenter of this text, in which I report on a study examining how a pre-service teacher (PST) relies on decoloniality as a guiding thread for love and hope, connecting the English language to the lived and learning realities of 5th-grade students. To pursue this aim, I address the following research question: *How does a pre-service teacher perceive the intersection of decoloniality and the pedagogy of love and hope in helping 5th graders see the English language as connected to their realities*? In the following section, I explore this question in greater depth.

Methodology

Research Context

MCMTEC has been conducted at the municipal public school CIEP[10] 250 as an opportunity to offer ELT to children from the public sector. Unfortunately, English is not taught to 1st to 5th

[10] CIEP – Centro Integrado de Educação Pública – Integrated Center of Public Education

graders in public schools, unlike in most private schools. Thus, MCMTEC, to a certain extent, may unveil opportunities for hope and social ascension for 5th graders.

In MCMTEC, classes are prepared under the influence of Freirean pedagogy, focusing primarily on raising learners' awareness of who they are in the world and how their reading of the wor(l)d can change their roles in society. Furthermore, it follows Siqueira's proposal of teaching English as a Lingua Franca (Siqueira, 2020), in which language is conceived as practice, knowledge as embodied, communication as contextual, meaning as co-constructed in each interaction, learners as legitimate in their practice, and language as political and ideological.

Situating the project within the school was a vital and yet complex endeavor, representing an effort to develop and implement strategies that challenge how formal schooling perpetuates social inequality in Brazil. It was deeply influenced by Canagarajah (2007), who highlighted the creative strategies employed by teachers and students in peripheral communities. For instance, the classroom strategies were designed to empower children to use English in ways that addressed their need to attain proficiency levels comparable to those of private-school students, while simultaneously cultivating subtle resistance to the linguistic imperialism critiqued by scholars as an inherent consequence of the global ELT enterprise. MCMTEC's classes were held once a week, each lasting two hours. The themes explored in each lesson were closely connected to the lived realities of the 5th-grade students and were adapted to align with the English language competencies outlined in the BNCC (BRASIL, 2018) for elementary education. The lessons primarily focused on the first of BNCC's competencies: identifying one's

place and that of others in a plurilingual and multicultural world. This focus encouraged learners to critically reflect on how EL learning can foster greater integration into a globalized society, including potential contributions to their future engagement in the world of work.

Participant

The participant, Pietra—who chose to have her real name disclosed in this study—was one of five pre-service teachers working under my supervision in MCMTEC. Regarding the ethical procedures adopted in this study, in addition to the project being approved by our university, Pietra signed a consent form agreeing to the use of her data for research purposes. As a member of MCMTEC, she received a 24-month grant from UERJ. Her involvement in the project spanned from her third to sixth academic terms at the university. Pietra taught one group of students from March to December 2023 and another from March to December 2024. In both groups students' age ranged from nine to thirteen, which is another challenge teachers face in Brazilian public schools for two reasons. First, due to socioeconomic issues, some families enroll their children in school after the recommended age. Second, due to low literacy levels, many students repeat grades 1 through 5, resulting in classrooms that are often age-heterogeneous.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were generated from Pietra's narratives within the weekly reflective reports she was assigned. These reports required her to describe the lessons she taught and reflect on her practice based on the texts discussed during our weekly group meetings. Additionally, she was asked to create visual narratives

(Kalaja, Paiva, & Barcelos, 2008; Kalaja et al., 2021; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) to express the emotions she experienced during her classes. To enrich her reports, Pietra often encouraged her fifth graders to complement their writing activities with images. This approach allowed the students to express their ideas both creatively and visually, catering to different learning styles and making the activity more engaging. Furthermore, it could support their expression of ideas when struggling with English words.

I made use of content analysis, which, according to Bardin (2011), is a systematic and objective technique for describing the content of messages. It seeks to interpret the meanings, intentions, and contexts underlying communication by categorizing and quantifying elements within texts. Bardin defines it as a set of techniques for analyzing communications that employ systematic and objective procedures to infer knowledge related to the conditions of production and reception of these messages. The process generally unfolds in three main phases: (a) pre-analysis – organization of the material, formulation of hypotheses, and definition of categories; (b) exploration of the material – systematic coding and classification of content; and (c) treatment of results, inference, and interpretation – analysis of the categories to produce meaningful interpretations.

I echo Bardin's view that content analysis goes beyond simply counting words. In this study, it contributed to revealing underlying meanings in the images and to interpreting the latent content of communication in a structured and rigorous way. During the pre-analysis, I looked at over 15 of Pietra's reports. In the second phase, I selected two of her reports. In the first, she portrayed a lesson about the Thanksgiving holiday, including activities to encourage the children to express gratitude for

people and things in their lives, as well as their future plans. The second was her final year report. The first report described a lesson taught on November 22, 2024. Based on the perspective of the pedagogy of possibility of *Pedagogia dos Sonhos Possíveis*[11] (Freire, 2001), Pietra started the lesson providing the 5th graders with words related to gratitude, hope, occupations and violence as a brainstorm. In the last phase of the analysis, when I treated results, two categories were found. These categories will be discussed in the findings section.

Pietra's Reported Lesson

Aiming at contrasting November holidays in Brazil (**Black Consciousness Day)** and in the USA (Thanksgiving), the lesson was designed to: a) raise learners' awareness of their place in Brazilian society; b) practice expressing future plans and volition in English; and c) promote reflection on cultural differences and values in relation to two holidays celebrated at the end of November. Analyzing pictures of families celebrating Thanksgiving and comparing it with Zumbi dos Palmares[12] celebrations could foster cross-cultural understanding and highlight similarities and differences between traditions.

After the brainstorm, Pietra asked students if they knew who Zumbi dos Palmares was. It helped gauge 5th graders' familiarity with Brazilian history and introduced an important figure in the context of resistance and freedom, i.e. decolonising. *Then, Pietra showed a video in English with Portuguese subtitles*

[11] Published only in Portuguese, it means Pedagogy of Possible/Attainable Dreams

[12] Zumbi dos Palmares is one of the most iconic figures in Brazilian history and a powerful symbol of resistance against slavery, Black liberation, and anti-colonial struggle.

to provide both visual and auditory input, enhancing engagement and accessibility while exploring the historical and cultural context of George Floyd's death (https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000007159353/george-floyd-arrest-death-video.html). Since this video had been widely shown on TV and on the internet, without any age restrictions, most 5th graders were already familiar with its content. Pietra then asked the students whether violence in Brazil differs from what was depicted in the video. The second part of the class was to review and practice how to express future ideas and volition in relation to each learner's life and reality. This part focused on language skills, specifically grammar and vocabulary related to future plans and desires. Connecting these to students' lives made the practice relevant and meaningful. From this point onwards, the children wrote the sentences they created and, ultimately, expressed their volition through drawings.

As assigned, Pietra's visual narrative (VN) was created after I read her report describing the class. In the report, she detailed how they debated the theme of Black Lives Matter while practicing how to express future plans and volition. Her VN (Fig. 1) was designed to visually represent how she had felt that day.

Figure 1. *Pietra's VN*



In summary, the analyzed data consist of written narratives from two of her reports—one sent to me on November 30th and the other on December 15th, 2024, and Pietra's visual narrative portraying how she sees herself with the 5th graders. Based on content analysis from the perspective of Bardin (2011), two categories were found: (i) hope as a tool to transform the world; and (ii) love as an action of resistance. These categories are developed in the following section.

Findings

Hope as a Tool to Transform the World

As Freire (1994) argues, hope requires practice to become historical concreteness. Based on Pietra's report, I learned that by using the planned strategies and activities in the lesson, both Pietra and the 5th graders had the opportunity not only to practice English structures but also to reflect on their social status. According to Pietra, during the class discussion, the students shared the occupations of their parents and close relatives and only two children mentioned that one of their parents had a university degree, while all the others stated that their family members were blue-collar workers. The 5th graders had no expectations of pursuing careers different from those of their relatives.

Freire (1994, p. 12) posits that the belief that hope alone will transform the world—an action undertaken in naiveté—is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism. Discussing the occupations of their relatives could have reinforced the belief among the 5th graders that they could not strive for better job opportunities. However, by practicing the expression of volition, they were able to envision possible dreams

and aspirations. Pietra explained that if they kept studying and fighting, they could pursue careers different from their parents'. To reinforce this, she had them complete the sentence she wrote on the board: If I keep studying hard, I will be….". This aligns with Freire's idea of transforming the relations of production of social wealth, along with their ideological-political dimensions.

The pedagogy of possibility, proposed by Freire and reinforced by Kumaradivelu (1994), provided Pietra with the framework to tailor her practice to meet the 5th graders' needs, both in terms of individual goals and societal expectations. The group discussion and the activity itself were pivotal in helping Pietra and the 5th graders see hope as a means to transform their world. For instance, Pietra overcame the hopelessness she had previously felt when planning lessons. She finally found purpose in striving to help learners think critically. As Freire (1994, p. 8) advocates, attempting "to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, as if that struggle were reduced to calculated acts alone (…) is a frivolous illusion." Pietra was able to understand that her classroom was a profoundly humanizing space where she interacted with children who were developing their critical thinking skills. This dynamic was evident when the 5th graders were assigned a paired task: creating questions in English using the interrogative pronoun *why* based on class content. Each pair formulated a question and, with Pietra's guidance, the group attempted to answer them using both English and Portuguese. Two of their questions were: "Why will everybody here stop studying?" and "Why don't we have English classes as other students do?"

In the sequence, I present Excerpts 1 to 3—taken from Pietra's report submitted on December 15, 2024—while Excerpt 4 comes from the report submitted earlier, on November 30, 2024.

Excerpt 1

> Looking back on my journey as a participant in the *Multiculturalidade e Multiletramentos Críticos no Ensino de Inglês para Crianças* project, I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude. Over the past two years, working as both a student teacher and researcher, I have grown immensely, both professionally and personally. I have come to understand that the classroom is a profoundly humanizing space where we interact with children who are developing their critical thinking skills. (...) Reflecting on my experience, I realize that not only have I taught lessons to these children, but I have also learned a great deal from them. Being in a school environment allowed me to gain an up-close perspective on the dynamics of a public school.

Pietra realized that hope requires practice to achieve historical concreteness[13]. When discussing the possible careers pursued by the 5th graders' relatives, she ignited hope in their souls by showing them that opportunities existed to transform their fate—they were building hope together. As a result of their conversation, their VNs reflect an understanding that being limited to blue-collar jobs was not a 'privilege' of their communities but rather a consequence of capitalism and an unfair society.

Hope emerged when the 5th graders—despite having very limited English instruction—managed to articulate their career

[13] Historical concreteness is a concept rooted in critical theory (notably in the work of Paulo Freire) that emphasizes analyzing social, political, or educational issues within their specific historical conditions—rather than as abstract, universal, or deterministic phenomena.

aspirations. Notably, their VNs reveal how they positioned themselves centrally within their drawings, as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. They added color to their drawings as if they could color their future. As the main social actors in their lives, they envisioned themselves as veterinarians and doctors.

Figure 2. *A 10-year-old 5th grader's VN*

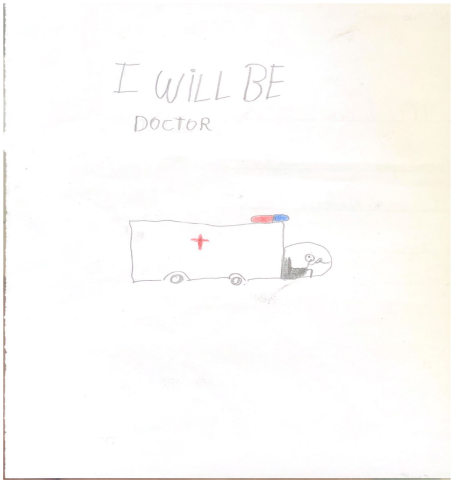
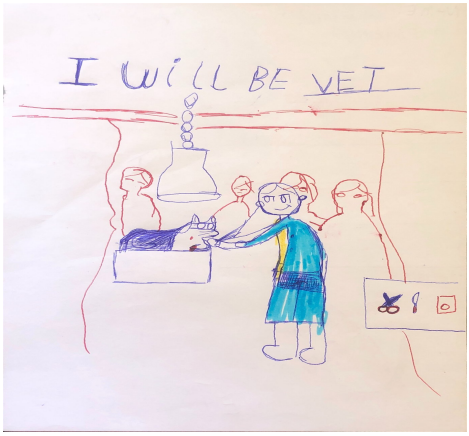


Figure 3. *A 12-year-old 5th grader*



These children managed to go beyond their ability to express their opinions in a language different from their native one—that, for us, Global South teachers, is hope. It means we can still struggle and use hope to transform education into an act of equity, where everyone has the right to learn a language conceived as practice, knowledge as embodied, communication as contextual, meaning as co-constructed in each interaction, learners as legitimate in their practice, and language as political and ideological (Jordão, 2023).

Love as an Action of Resistance

As Maturana (2002, p. 22) argues, interactions grounded in love nurture and sustain coexistence. This principle is exemplified in Excerpt 2, where Pietra demonstrates that love transcends mere emotion—it manifests as deliberate action and conscious choice. Her commitment to making a difference in her classroom compelled her to persistently dedicate her fullest effort, even amid systemic challenges. This is illustrated when she asserts in excerpt 2 that despite the adversities and inequalities inherent in teaching, neither her students' growth nor her own professional development could be overshadowed by these obstacles.

Excerpt 2

> Knowing that, even once a week, I could make a difference in the classroom is what motivates me to keep going. This impact became especially clear during our final class, when students expressed their gratitude and said how much they would miss us. I believe no obstacle can overshadow the joy of finishing a year and looking back to see that, in some way, I made a difference. Not every lesson went as planned, and not every student was eager to participate, but that's not what

truly matters to me.

The notion of love that encompasses human beings, individuals, and social connections can be observed in Excerpt 3, where Pietra states that "together, they sought to implement critical literacy and decolonial pedagogies." This implies that her work involved not only herself but also other human beings and individuals within a specific community: the pre-service teachers, the children, and me, as her supervisor. Pietra also conveys the idea that love does not exist in isolation; it coexists with other emotions such as empathy, perseverance, and patience. When these emotions are demonstrated to learners, their response manifests as a commitment to teaching and learning.

Excerpt 3

> Our workplace presented significant challenges. (...) However, through perseverance, collaboration, and a commitment to love and empathy, we managed to improve ourselves and work as a cohesive team. Together, we sought to implement critical literacy and decolonial pedagogies, contributing, even in small ways, to the social transformation these approaches can bring. (...) Over these two years, I have seen firsthand that learning does not only happen for students—it happens for teachers as well. (...) Once I approached them with empathy and patience, these students transformed into some of the most engaged and motivated learners. They blossomed when they felt seen and understood, and this shift reaffirmed my commitment to teaching.

There are many other instances of love as an action, as hooks (2003) proposes, evident in Pietra's report. It is expressed through care and affection in her attentive listening to the 5th graders' stories, experiences, and challenges in the classroom, often shaped by the difficult circumstances they navigate. Love is reflected in her recognition, respect, commitment, trust, and engagement with the children. Most of all, it emerges in the open communication that is straightforwardly built in their interactions, as seen in the lesson reported by Pietra. In this case, her love in form of action shaped learners' actions, and the more committed and engaged Pietra was, the more the 5th graders became.

Moreover, in Pietra's VN (fig.2), there is unmistakable love in the little red hearts and golden stars that simultaneously circle Pietra's head and shine on the classroom board. It is the same love, as Freire claims, as the most crucial characteristic of dialogue and the constitutive force animating all pedagogies of liberation. When asked to draw a picture to demonstrate how she felt after class, Pietra chose to represent pedagogical love: a depiction of a teacher surrounded by smiling children, as she often does, with the certainty that, at least in their classroom, 5th graders of a public school are seen as human beings capable of learning and expressing their opinions—a space where colonial silencing and invisibility do not exist.

Finally, in the fourth excerpt, Pietra recognizes that she was never alone. It demonstrated her understanding that our project was rooted in love and empathy—emotions that, as Freire claims, are essential to the social transformation of the 5th graders.

Excerpt 4

> Throughout this journey, I was never alone. I could always count on my fellow colleagues and our supervisor. The meetings we held to discuss our practices and align our perspectives were incredibly enriching. These sessions reminded me that, despite the challenges, I had a team of trustworthy individuals working with me toward a shared goal: providing students with a humanized and critical education. As Freire (1970) emphasizes, education must be rooted in love and empathy, as these are essential for liberation and social transformation.

Additionally, Pietra could figure out that enacting a project like ours is a way to practice love and hope as a long-term struggle. It requires dedication and a willingness to raise children's awareness at an early age so that they are prepared to read the wor(l)d without naiveté and without believing there is a "best" English or a "best" way to learn it.

Implications and Conclusion

Decolonial theories center marginalized subjects as agents of their own liberation, offering pathways to break free from persistent colonial structures. In this study, I examine—through Pietra's narratives—how decoloniality can serve as a framework for cultivating love and hope, bridging the English language with the lived realities of 5th graders in a marginalized community.

Every pedagogical act is inherently an act of hope. Within the MCMTEC project, I designed strategies and thematic content to empower a pre-service teacher and her students in a socially disadvantaged setting. These tools aimed to help them appropriate English in ways that aligned with their needs while

gently subverting the linguistic imperialism pervasive in Brazilian English Language Teaching. Specially grounded in the liberatory praxis of Paulo Freire, this work embraces pedagogies of hope and love, alongside amorosity—a concept articulated by Freire and expanded by Barcelos (2020) as critical to transformative education.

In Brazil, dominant ideologies continue to shape perceptions of the role of the English language, as a way to create different social layers: some students have access to learning it, whereas others don't. Consequently, such perceptions perpetuate prejudice, leading Brazilian learners to internalize these power structures, which in turn influence their discourse and practices—what Maldonado-Torres (2007) describes as a system that simultaneously preaches the natural inferiority of subjects and the colonization of nature In this study, by employing decolonial practices aligned with the pedagogy of love and the pedagogy of hope, as advocated by Freire and hooks, it was possible to foster an atmosphere of confidence and support children in developing their ability to express ideas, question common-sense beliefs, and challenge dominant ideologies.

It is important to state that my intention was not to use the results of this qualitative study to create generalizations. However, one limitation I observe is that it focused on a specific group and one pre-service teacher in a public school. I understand that this may seem to restrict the scope of examining the theme. I believe that a longitudinal study involving other students, using similar activities and strategies, would provide more substantial insights into how decolonial practices may contribute to combating linguistic imperialism and dispelling the belief that English cannot be effectively taught or learned in public schools in Brazil, as it is in the private sector.

Considering that decolonial practices may foster a more humanizing perspective of ELF—and, by extension, ELF made in Brazil (Siqueira, 2020; Jordão, 2023)—it is imperative that future research investigate how these practices can empower both learners and pre-service teachers in other contexts. This issue represents a promising agenda for future research, as tracking the implementation of decolonial practices and Freire's ideas on love and hope in ELF classrooms at Brazilian public schools could help improve linguistic education policies in greater depth.

I hope that teacher educators and pre-service teachers can benefit from the outcomes of this study by better understanding the connection between decoloniality and the pedagogy of hope and love. In doing so, they can create spaces that positively emphasize how the English language can be taught non-oppressively, serving its true purpose of connecting diverse human beings and reconnecting people worldwide.

Disclaimer

During the preparation of this work, I used chat.gpt.com and chat.deepseek.com to proofread spelling and to format references. After using this tool/service, I reviewed and edited all aspects of the output as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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CHAPTER 4

A Decolonial Approach to English Language Education in the Global South: Teachers' Voices for Critical Radical Love and Social Transformation

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Abstract

In this chapter, we explore decolonial approaches to English Language Education (ELE) in Colombia using a trio-ethnographic methodology. We take the lived experiences of three public school teachers to resist colonial legacies and reimagine ELE within critical literacy, radical love, critical positive psychology, and Buen Vivir. We illustrate how local knowledge, translanguaging, and multimodal teaching practices that honor students' voices and agency challenge national policies of bilingualism. We provide implications for Global South contexts that highlight students' voices, communal well-being, and collaborative development of curricula.

Keywords: Decolonial Approaches, English Language Education (ELE), Critical Literacy, Critical Radical Love, Critical Positive Psychology, Buen Vivir

Introduction

English Language Education (ELE) in the Global South, particularly in Colombia, continues to grapple with the pervasive influences of colonial legacies through neoliberal policies. For more than twenty years, national policies on bilingualism have adopted international standards (e.g., Common European Framework of Reference—CEFR) and have been generally shaped by epistemologies from the Global North (Becerra-Posada, 2024; Ensucho, 2023; Granado-Beltran, 2018; Macedo, 2020; Mignolo, 2011). These frameworks often leave out local knowledge systems, indigenous traditions, and culturally situated pedagogies, contributing to the perpetuation of inequities in the educational system.

In this chapter, we examine ELE in Colombia through the lenses of critical literacy (Mora et al., 2022) and decolonial frameworks (Ensuncho, 2023). We analyze significant intersections of critical radical love (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2000), critical positive psychology (Derakhshan, 2022; Ludwig & Sambanis, 2023; Mercer & Gregersen, 2023; Worth & Smith, 2017), and the principles of Buen Vivir[14] (good living) (Mignolo, 2018; Walsh, 2005) by foregrounding the voices of three public school English educators in northern Colombia. By centering our lived experiences and pedagogical reflections, we illustrate ways

[14] We have decided to use the Spanish term across the chapter to emphasize its distinction from the Western, usually individualistic, notion of well-being. We have intentionally decided not to use italics or quotation marks to show that it should not be treated as a "foreign" concept.

local teachers critically navigate and resist colonial legacies in ELE and offer localized, contextualized alternatives to more just, relational, and transformative pedagogical practices. In our context, these ideas align closely with Indigenous ways of treating and healing (Walsh, 2010). As we center local epistemologies, we can avoid reproducing Northern framings of self-care and rather reconceive well-being as a community and decolonial practice. Rather than using the general notion of positive psychology, which is often driven by individual and productivity perspectives, our considerations allow us to sit close to the literature on critical positive psychology (Worth & Smith, 2017), where we push back against the neoliberal constructions that inflect ways of practicing self-care. In our case, flourishing is a practice of self-care, meant to maintain communities and identities, with collective futures in mind.

These underlying theoretical (and praxis-related) tenets serve as the basis for the implementation of transformative ELE practices that can help to challenge the status quo, foster critical literacy (Janks, 2014, 2010; Janks & Comber, 2013; Luke, 2004; Mora et al., 2022), and promote intercultural practices in English education (Fandiño-Parra, 2021; Granados-Beltran, 2016; Mignolo, 2013; Soto-Molina & Mendez, 2020; Walsh, 2005, 2013). We hope this chapter can situate ELE within the broader struggle for social transformation and epistemic justice, advocating for practices that emphasize Buen Vivir and equity. To do so, this study addresses the following research question: how do three English language teachers challenge hegemonic views on ELE and incorporate decolonial pedagogies of radical love, Buen Vivir, and social transformation into their teaching practices?

By means of a trio-ethnographic study, we critically examined our personal and pedagogical assumptions about

language teaching, exploring how these perspectives shape our roles as educators in ELE. Luz Ely positions herself as an emerging critical activist, through reflective practice, with the goal of fostering active citizenship and a commitment to social justice and equity in her students. Luzkarime, on the other hand, views language and literacy education as an emancipatory practice, in line with Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, able to foster in learners the development of critical tools to read and speak their "words and worlds," as well as to listen to the words and worlds of others in dialogic and peaceful ways. Finally, Luis Fernando has an educational administrator's perspective and thinks that education should promote human values and social justice. We are three urban public high school English teachers from northern Colombia.

In this chapter, we delve into how we navigate the challenges and constraints of teaching English in historically marginalized contexts, as well as the ways in which we challenge decolonial legacies by incorporating critical decolonial practices into our teaching. Our insights reflect the challenges of implementing a curriculum shaped by national bilingualism policies while addressing the cultural and linguistic needs of our students.

Conceptual Configuration of Decolonial English Language Education

The theoretical foundations of our study are derived from several interpretations of decolonial pedagogies in ELE. They are all grounded in the principles of critical radical love, critical positive psychology, and the Latin American indigenous tradition of Buen Vivir.

Critical Radical Love and Positive Psychology: Towards the Achievement of Buen Vivir

Our work is inspired by Freire's seminal work on radical love, and its potential to promote transformation in ELE. Freire (1970) argued that education should serve as a practice of emancipation, resilience, and re-existence for educators and learners. Critical radical love encourages teachers to critically engage with their practice, challenging systems of oppression while nurturing empathy and solidarity in the classroom (Derakhshan, 2022; Ludwig & Sambanis, 2023; Worth & Smith, 2017). When discussing radical love, bell hooks (2000) reimagines love as an action rooted in mutual care, respect, and responsibility, capable of transforming individuals and communities. Her vision challenges us to confront oppressive structures and encourages us to promote epistemologies of hope, equity, re-existence and transformative approaches to love.

Positive psychology emerged in the late 1990s (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000) in an attempt to move beyond deficit models of human behavior, emphasizing on the study of what makes life flourishing (e.g. positive emotions, character strengths, meaning, and engagement). In language education contexts, researchers have applied positive psychology to explore how enjoyment, hope, resilience, gratitude, and classroom relationships contribute to better outcomes for learners and teachers alike (Derakhshan, 2022; Wu, 2025; Zuniga & Simard, 2024). However, scholars point out that traditional positive psychology often privileges individual achievement and Western-centric notions of happiness (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008); and underplays structural inequities, cultural diversity, and collective or ecological dimensions of well-being (van Zyl & Rothman, 2022; van Zyl et

al., 2023). Critical positive psychology thus emerges to address these gaps: it expands the lens from individual flourishing toward communal resilience, social justice, systemic constraints, and the interdependence between human well-being and broader collective, cultural, and ecological realities (Villalobos & Cabrera, 2025; Zwitter et al., 2025). This critical orientation helps ensure that positive psychology in ELE does not reinforce inequities or impose one-size-fits-all models, but rather supports learners' agency, acknowledges difference, and works toward sustainable, socially engaged well-being.

Even though critical positive psychology is a notion geographically stemming in the global north, it incorporates principles that align well with (and echo) the perspectives of critical radical love. Some of these principles promote students' well-being, flourishing, and agency in ELE (Derakhshan, 2022; Worth & Smith, 2017). Incorporating this framework in ELE can help students address the emotional and psychological needs that learning a language entails. We believe a critical perspective to positive psychology, that is, one that moves beyond the individualistic views of human development and more into advocating for social justice, communal resilience, systemic well-being, harmony, and sustainability can be successfully used in ELE (Ludwig & Sambanis, 2023; Mercer & Gregersen, 2023).

The notion of Buen Vivir comes to consolidate a tri-fold theoretical grounding for our study. Buen Vivir is an Andean indigenous philosophy that emphasizes fostering harmony with nature, community interdependence, and the well-being of all beings (Walsh, 2010). It is also a practice that transcends individual relationships and resonates with communal well-being, rejecting extractive, capitalist perspectives that prioritize profit and 'development' over people (Becerra Posada, 2024;

Walsh, 2010). Even though the notions of critical radical love and Buen Vivir have not yet been associated in literature, we firmly believe they complement each other as theoretical support for a pedagogy of language education that embraces diversity, student agency, and transformation.

Healing as a collective project is at the core of critical radical love, critical positive psychology, and Buen Vivir. It can be realized through improved relational practices and advanced change in social structures. While critical radical love already emphasizes dialogue, mutual respect, and the centering of marginalized voices, bringing in critical positive psychology and Buen Vivir adds dimensions that radical love alone does not fully cover: attention to flourishing and resilience at both the individual and community level, and the grounding of well-being in ecological and cultural sustainability. Taken together, these frameworks invite us to carry out practices that foster dialogue and mutual respect, with the aim of amplifying a diversity of voices and perspectives. They also encourage us to pursue educational projects, therefore teaching and learning practices, that promote empathy, critical reflection, and collective well-being, as well as implement community-led projects revolving around ecological, cultural, and social sustainability (Mignolo, 2018; Walsh, 2005).

Advancing in Decolonial Perspectives: Sustainability, Equity, and Agency

We examine decolonial theory to analyze how ELE practices in Colombia reflect and perpetuate colonial hierarchies. Ensuncho (2023) emphasizes the need to deconstruct dominant knowledge systems and open relevant spaces for underrepresented perspectives. In this way of thinking, we use critical pedagogy

(e.g., critical literacies and multimodal critical consciousness) to unveil the way power dynamics work (Mora et al., 2022) and foster students' *conscientização* (Freire, 1970) and agency for social transformation. The decolonial turn (Mignolo, 2013; Walsh, 2005) implies a shift from Eurocentric epistemologies to local, situated practices and ways of knowing, which promotes equity and agency. In ELE, particularly, it involves a commitment to challenging linguistic colonialism and promoting equitable, culturally sustaining practices that recognize the complex interplay of language, culture, and power (Granados-Beltrán, 2018; Soto-Molina & Méndez, 2020).

Including critical intercultural practices in ELE helps decolonization by questioning the power of dominant cultures and creating safe spaces for fair cultural engagement and diversity. Mignolo (2013), Kumaravadivelu (2003), and Granados-Beltrán (2018) reject essentialist views on culture and linguistic colonization and invite embracing diverse, locally situated epistemologies. Decoloniality changes the way we think about English as superior or the only valuable language, challenging its use as a tool of neoliberal and colonial power. It also encourages teachers to be transformative intellectuals who challenge colonial power dynamics and help students use critical thinking to go beyond boundaries and deal with systemic injustices.

Methodological decisions: A Trio-Ethnographic research design

We employed a trio-ethnographic design (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013; Norris & Sawyer, 2012) to critically reflect on our lived experiences as English language educators in public schools in northern Colombia. By exploring our *curreres*, or

personal histories (Pinar, 1994), we built dialogic (Freire, 1970) narratives, which we then analyzed collectively to gain insights into our individual journeys, contradictions, and challenges in our pathway toward decolonial ELE.

Our inquiry involved several online encounters over the course of six months, as well as asynchronous reflective collective narratives. We used a Google Drive folder to share both individual and collective narratives, which were then commented on and expanded in online research meetings. Data collection and analysis were cyclical, with online meetings being the main scenario for analyzing written material, as well as prompting new reflections that led to further journaling in asynchronous spaces. The main data sources for this chapter were individual researchers' autobiographies as well as a set of tri-ethnographic encounters where we reflected upon a variety of issues around our project of becoming decolonial English language educators.

For analyzing the individual autobiographies, we used a cross-researcher analysis, which allowed us to read and examine each other's narratives in the search for intersections, divergence, and cruces of meaning and experience. We reflected on our classroom settings, difficulties, and achievements related to the integration of critical literacies and intercultural practices. In our critical dialogues, we referred to specific experiences shaped by national bilingualism policies (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006; 2017), highlighting how these policies influenced our practices and intersected or differed with our theoretical framework. Our findings highlight the complexities and transformative potential of incorporating decolonial methodologies in ELE. They emphasize the importance of critically engaging with local contexts to foster inclusive, reflective, and socially just educational practices.

Our findings: A tri-vocal journey toward decolonial ELE

Our methodological design influenced our data collection and analysis procedures, as well as the presentation of our findings. This section includes extracts from our narratives in dialogue with relevant scholarship on decoloniality, critical radical love, and critical positive psychology.

Individual and Collective Decolonial Pathways

The focus of one of the first dialogic encounters was the analysis of our journeys toward decolonizing pedagogies. We are three English teachers with similar professional backgrounds and teaching contexts. However, our life histories, as well as our encounters with decolonial scholarship and practices, differ greatly. Figure 1 represents our individual journeys and intersecting pathways, which have led us to build a collective identity as decolonial English language educators in our context. The design of the diagram was inspired by symbols of the Zenú indigenous people, native to our geographical region, as a way to acknowledge our origin and ancestry, as well as our conscious purpose of sustaining and preserving our individual and collective identity.

The diagram shows the intricate weaving process of the *sombrero vueltiao,* probably the most famous symbol of Colombia and a traditional symbol of our land, which represents the patience, resilience, and artistry involved in our decolonial journey. Just as each strand of *caña flecha* (the cane used to make the hat) is intertwined to create a unified whole, our individual journeys, experiences, and perspectives have come together to form a collective vision of decolonial ELE. In the

middle of the diagram, we see three blue lines that intersect to form a circle. We have drawn inspiration from the three main waterways that bathe our region: the *Caño de Aguas Prietas, the Rio San Jorge, and the Rio Sinú*. They represent the flow, interconnectedness, and continuous movement that have characterized our educational journey, as well as our evolving pedagogical practices.

Figure 1. *Intersecting pathways toward decolonial ELE in northern Colombia.*



Note: Authors' Own Work. Inspired by Gagné et al. (2022).

Fragments of our autobiographies show how we have come to embrace decoloniality in our praxis. For instance, in her narrative, Luz Ely reflects a critical transition from traditional ELE to a decolonial framework (see Table 1). Her reflections on

institutional resistance, particularly concerning the use of students' L1, underscore the systemic barriers entrenched in Colombia's bilingualism policies. This resistance mirrors the colonial legacy that continues to prioritize English-only instruction, often at the expense of students' cultural identities (Soto-Molina & Méndez, 2020).

Narrative 1: Decolonial Practices at School 1

I am a 53-year-old mestiza, heterosexual English language educator with 23 years of public school and university experience. Initially, my professional growth consisted of ELT content-based didactics through colonial positions and ICT for education. I started reading Paulo Freire's work on my path toward my doctoral studies. His points of view led me to reevaluate the interaction among language, culture, and power. I came to see that to help my students, I had to go beyond reproducing colonial models and instead center their lived experiences, local knowledge, and cultural identities in my classroom activities, as well as encourage them to reclaim, interrogate, and transform in line with social justice, equity, empathy, and solidarity with the environment. The insights and critical literacy studies of Dr. Raul Mora, my dissertation advisor, encouraged me to look through personal stories of resistance against English acquisition. I recalled a Cimarrona trying to communicate with a foreign English-speaking visitor. Her motions expressed refusal when I suggested she study English. I also referred to a ninth grader who declared he was bored with Eurocentric material and grammar-oriented classes; he thought they had no bearing on him. Finally, I recalled a criticism from a colleague questioning why English teachers

neglected our customs in English lectures and why I fostered British holidays in class. I considered these encounters and the consequences of applying the transmissive techniques, replicating a society of silence (Darder & Mirón, 2006).

I was aware that the book-based content marginalized my students, as they primarily focused on foreign scenarios and global norms. Thereafter, I chose a research theme that tackled local issues and problems to encourage students to consider their cultural background and the local or worldwide concerns influencing their environment. I chose a tourist rural location, initially because the university where I also teach has a school section there, and also because the field of tourism was a prerequisite of my scholarship. I considered integrating critical literacy, interculturality, and multimodal practices that reflect the students' ways of being and enable them to produce and understand modern texts and the building of meaning (Mora, 2019). As teaching tools, I included drawings, posters, photo essays, memes, and community-driven narratives to encourage agency. Students chose subjects related to local concerns (customs and needs), sustainability, and the impact of tourism on our coastal culture.

I used the knowledge gained in the dissertation and some preliminary findings to plan problem-solving tasks in the school where I work in my city. Students showcased their creativity through diverse modes of expression, including posters, collages, and role-plays, combining L1 and L2 in their work. They proposed tangible solutions to local problems within a global framework, exploring how local cultural traditions interact with global trends to generate pride and introspection. Therefore, they offered concrete answers to local issues in a

worldwide context. As part of a decolonial English language education framework, I talked to the students about cultural representation and critical engagement. I followed up with a group discussion in which students underlined the need to preserve cultural roots even as they incorporated global information. Feeling included in the educational process, they valued talking about local environmental challenges, community needs, and cultural legacy. I noticed that this process not only enhanced language acquisition but also cultivated global citizens ready to navigate and challenge sociocultural inequities.

However, conflicts and discrepancies sometimes emerged among my colleagues, seeing the use of students' L1 as off-topic, distracting, and even disrespectful. They believe this approach is necessary to build the skills students need to align with dominant views in ELE. They also expressed discomfort with the inclusion of community heritage, preferring instead to celebrate white cultural supremacy. They expressed their views, reflected critically, and proposed solutions. National bilingualism policies are the biggest contradictions, as they adhere to international standards like the CEFR, leaving little room for local approaches. Institutional limitations, such as rigid curricula and a lack of resources, further constrained my ability to fully embrace these transformative methods.

I must confess that I am still in the process of unlearning and relearning. I have started my activism, but I am just in the beginning.

Luz Ely's transformative practices, grounded in Freire's (1970) pedagogy of radical love, foster a classroom space that

values students' voices and experiences. This aligns with Janks' (2010) model of critical literacy, which emphasizes diversity and the recognition of multiple discourses. The students' transition from resistance to active participation exemplifies how critical literacy and decolonial practices foster learners' agency by integrating their cultural realities into language education. In this way, her narrative is also echoed in Latin American scholarship on pedagogical love in ELT, such as Barcelos & Coelho (2016) and Barcelos (2020, 2025), discussing the notions of care and affection and their position in creating a more equitable and empowering learning space. Recognizing the emotional and cultural barriers students may encounter, she collected data and engaged in a multimodal, student-centered approach to provide opportunities for engagement, confidence, and agency.

Luis Fernando delves into the contradictions between his decolonial aspirations, and the rigid structures imposed by national bilingualism policies (see Table 2). Standardized CEFR-based curricula often do not consider students' lived realities in marginalized areas, so he is trying to change that by implementing a sociocritical-discursive curriculum. The application of critical radical love and critical positive psychology is evident in his attempts to foster student agency and self-reflection.

Narrative 2: Struggling with Decolonial Practices at School 2

I am 41 years old, and my experience in education combines teaching and administrative responsibilities. As a coordinator in a language center at a university, I must follow international policies to design the course program, which means I am

immersed in a colonial and hegemonic-oriented syllabus. In the school where I work as an English educator, I have started to walk on the path of decoloniality. I started my doctoral dissertation with the following excerpt from Alice in Wonderland: “Please tell me which way I ought to go from here.” I looked at the sociocritical-discursive curriculum to encourage the community to take charge of their lives and rethink education by showing it as a flexible and conversational structure in these works. The experience of co-researching in Luz Ely's dissertation equipped me with important insights to continue challenging curriculum constraints with an emphasis on decoloniality.

As I started teaching 11th graders in a public school, I perceived that Colombia's standardized curricula, connected to the country's bilingualism drive, definitely ignore the socio-cultural reality of underprivileged areas. Students’ cultural legacy and economic inequalities receive an English curriculum that is foreign to them. The content aims to meet international standards such as the CEFR, and the B1 level is required for national exams. This conflict led me to explore decolonial pedagogies that honor students' agency, cultural identity, and linguistic diversity. My dialogic curriculum proposal now turns into settings that support critical thinking, introspection, and intercultural awareness that are responsive to reality. However, it takes time to put strategies into action because the rigid system structures and policy limitations often make it difficult to make changes that are relevant and meaningful. I will continue making efforts to confront colonial remnants in English education.

Despite systemic barriers, Luis Fernando's classroom becomes a space for dialogic practices (Freire, 1970), enabling students to critically engage with their cultural identities and societal realities, embodying radical love. His ongoing struggle reflects the broader challenges of implementing decolonial practices within rigid institutional frameworks.

Luzkarime's narrative offers a personal reflection on her journey toward decolonial ELE. Her experiences highlight the tensions between traditional expectations of English teaching and the transformative potential of translanguaging practices (Canagarajah, 2005). By embracing students' L1 alongside English, she disrupts the colonial hierarchy that privileges English over local languages. Her engagement with Buen Vivir underscores a holistic approach to education, prioritizing students' emotional and social well-being alongside academic success (Walsh, 2005). This aligns with the principles of critical positive psychology (Worth & Smith, 2017), emphasizing collective well-being and social justice.

Narrative 3: Me as an aspiring decolonial English educator

I always joke that my first encounter with decoloniality was a song by Ricardo Arjona (1996), a popular Guatemalan singer. It is called Si el Norte fuera el Sur (If the North were the South). I was probably around the age of 12, and of course, I had no idea my career would lead me to become an advocate for decolonial practices in ELE. The song describes a hypothetical world where being black and short would be the most desirable look, Fidel Castro would be an athlete 'running' stocks on Wall Street, and the rafts would sail from Miami to

La Habana. The song is, above all, rampant criticism of US culture of consumerism (*... supermarket scholars, they have everything but have paid for nothing... Viva Wall Street and Viva Donald Trump!*); imperialism (*the bars and stars have stolen our flag*); and policies (*at 18 you are too young to have a drink at a bar, but you are fully grown up for war and for killing*).

...

However, it really was when I was conducting my doctoral program that I first encountered critical decolonial practices (Freire, 1970; Martin-Rojo & Mijares, 2007; Resende, 2021; Walsh, 2010). Interestingly enough, a critical, decolonial US scholar was the one who introduced me to decoloniality in research and the notion of global North and global South (Guilherme, 2019)... she would invite me to read and learn from scholarship produced in and for the global South and incorporate it in my research. Back in Colombia, I started to do the same with my students in a research methodology course, as well as with my thesis advisees at the MA in ELT at two universities in northern Colombia. I also started deep reflections around the purpose of teaching English (and critical literacies) in Colombia.

...

I acknowledge the colonial ways I used to perpetuate in my teaching before: focusing on expanding 'white' culture and language as superior, or the only way to 'open doors' to new realities. I am an advocate for decolonial English language education now. I became an English teacher in a public school a year ago, and I have been navigating the challenges of teaching English from a decolonial perspective to students who

face systemic inequities and pressing social issues, such as extreme poverty, drug micro-trafficking, and domestic abuse, among others. I keep wondering: how can I make English learning relevant to this student population, who are more worried about fulfilling their basic needs and sometimes just surviving?

…

Shifting our ways of teaching English is not an easy task, especially considering the expectations generally assumed by people about what English teaching should look like. The school community, including students, school administrators, teachers of other subject areas, and even parents, has well-ingrained beliefs about English learning being a process of studying, memorizing, and repeating vocabulary and grammar rules; filling in worksheets; and promoting native speakerism, among other things.

…

One of the main heritages of colonial ELE is the so-called "English-only" rule…Facing the task of teaching English in the context of public schools in Colombia was also a realization that Spanish needs to be used at different moments and for different reasons in the classroom (e.g., to lower students' anxiety about the foreign language, to connect deeply with their personal and socio-emotional issues). Recent scholarship on translanguaging has been useful to make peace with myself and move beyond entrenched notions of native vs foreign language use.

Finally, one of the biggest challenges I face in my decision to teach English from a decolonial perspective is the pressure exercised by the national English test that students

have to take in 11th grade. Besides measuring students only on the basis of their linguistic knowledge, the test is totally culturally irrelevant. Students are asked questions about cultural aspects that are alien to them (e.g., signs on a train station when there are no trains in Colombia). Balancing decolonial teaching within institutional and educational constraints is, without a doubt, a daunting task, but I keep struggling and pushing forward with the firm belief that it is a way to affirm students' identity and challenge global, homogenizing views of language and literacy learning in particular and education in general. My main purpose as a decolonial educator is to be able to foster in my students the search for criticality and liberation that Paulo Freire's work inspired and to sustain a view on learning English, not as a question of adhering but as a question of resis[exist]tance (Freire & Passetti, 2018).

Luzkarime struggles with reconciling her identity as an English language instructor and her identity as a critical language and literacy educator. On one hand, she wrestles with the expectations of improving students' language proficiency and her beliefs about English teaching, shaped by years of professional development and teaching experience. On the other hand, she acknowledges her role as a critical decolonial educator. Her everyday practice prioritizes students' life stories; therefore, making connections to their students' language, as well as highlighting their funds of knowledge (González & Mall, 2002) and strengths (instead of their perceived deficit) (López, 2017), can make a difference in how they perceive language and literacy development.

The trifold analysis of our autobiographies signals various intersecting points. First, we were able to identify that access to continuous professional development, as well as to relevant scholarship in the field, was crucial to shape our decolonial educator identities. Echoing Mignolo's (2011) notion of "epistemic disobedience", we have been able to form critical professional selves, which now allow us to contest and challenge the coloniality of knowledge immersed in national curricula and assessment policies.

Second, we share a strong sense of othering; that is, our personal life histories and professional journeys have ignited in us increased awareness and commitment toward the other; a sense of responsibility toward the students in all of who they are, and what they bring to the classroom. In line with principles of critical positive psychology, our duty as decolonial language educators is first and foremost to nurture a pedagogy that humanizes the student and enables them to flourish toward their full selves (Mcintyre, 2019).

Finally, we have discovered common challenges both at the personal and institutional levels. These tensions between structural constraints and our commitment to decolonizing our practices may be a reflection of our role as teachers as transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 2018). The three autobiographies converge in our objective of reimagining ELE as decolonial (Quijano, 2000), transformative (hooks, 1994), and deeply rooted in students' life histories and trajectories. All of these cruces of hope and contradictions were further explored in meaningful collective exchanges. The next sections present the findings of some of these explorations and reflections.

Initial provocations

Our narrative encounters were a rich site for unveiling interesting dynamics, struggles, and moments of hope. The following extract represents a meaningful provocation about our role as English teachers in our times and in our contexts.

> **Luz Ely**: I keep returning to one question: What does it mean to teach English here, in this place, under these conditions? We follow a curriculum that barely acknowledges our students' realities. Most of us include textbook materials that present a world where English is tied to success, but that success always seems to belong to someone else, someone foreign or distant. Freire (1970) argues that education is never neutral; it either domesticates or liberates. He calls for an education that problematizes power relations rather than reproducing them.
>
> **Luis Fernando:** From an institutional perspective, we have to align with the National Bilingualism Policy (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006). The school expects us to deliver results, students to pass English tests, and to be bilingual. But are they really learning to use English in relevant ways? Ways that speak to their own realities? Guerrero-Nieto (2023) critiques the bilingualism discourse in Colombia, arguing that it reinforces linguistic imperialism by privileging English over local languages and dialects. What are we, English teachers, doing in our classrooms, then? Are we also reinforcing this linguistic imperialism? Was this also reinforced on us throughout our pre-service training?

Luzkarime: That's the problem, isn't it? English is presented as a passport to a better life, a "language that opens doors," but for whom? Here at my school, most of the students have very little expectation about what they will need English for in the future. Pennycook (2021) discusses the coloniality of ELT, where English is positioned as a language of economic and social mobility but ultimately reinforces social hierarchies. This is clear when we see the results in English in the National test: the gap between private elite schools and public schools is outrageous and let us not even talk about the difference between elite schools in urban areas, and any school in rural areas. If you consider race, this is even more salient: the regions of the country where indigenous or black people are a majority show the lowest results. This does not only speak of social, economic, and educational inequality, it may also be a reflection of the lack of motivation, relevance or need for learning English in this context. ... This is also the situation in my current teaching context where most students will not have an opportunity to pursue higher education, but will have to get a job as soon as they finish high school, so they can help their families get through the day. Some of them are already working. However, they will all be measured by a national test, which expects them to reach a B1 level in English, no matter their background, geographical context, or life story. And their possibility to access higher education will mostly depend on their results of this test.

The depth of the reflection that can be seen in the previous extract is a sample of ways in which teachers question hegemonic perspectives on ELE. Critical consciousness, or *conscientização* (in the words of Freire), is the first step toward challenging and

acting upon colonial legacies in teaching English in these particular contexts. English teaching in Colombia is clearly permeated by issues of race, social class, and economic prosperity. Not only does this influence the way the language is perceived by students (and their families) in our contexts, but it may also impact their learning trajectories. From the lens of critical positive psychology, having this sort of reflection around the motives and purposes (or lack thereof) for learning English can help educators to connect more closely to students' personal life stories and future trajectories. Such reflection could be the starting point to implement strategies that infuse the language teaching and learning experience with positive, transformative frames, such as hope, courage, and collective well-being, as we struggle with the constraints and challenges of developing students' proficiency in an additional language, as required by our educational context (Dewaele et al., 2019).

Classroom Initiatives for decolonial ELE

In our collective reflections, we found opportunities to share classroom praxis initiatives that can foster decolonial pedagogies. By integrating local issues, Luz Ely's projects focused on local environmental and cultural topics, encouraging students to reflect critically on their communities. Through dialogic practices, Luis Fernando implemented teaching strategies that fostered critical discussions around cultural identity and systemic inequalities. Luzkarime incorporated translanguaging into classroom activities and school-wide projects that prioritized students' identities and community issues. These initiatives collectively promoted student agency, critical literacy, and intercultural understanding within the classroom.

Luz Ely: [Speaking of professions] I had this student last year who said in Spanish, “I don't know, teacher, maybe [I'd like to be] a fisherman like my dad.” The textbook expected him to say “engineer” or “doctor.” So, I switched it up. I created a project called “My Community in the Future” (inspired by Pfortmüller & Luchsinger, 2013) to explore how local professions could be reimagined. Students rewrote the narrative of what success meant. In this view, Janks (2010) argues that critical literacy should disrupt dominant discourses by allowing students to redefine their social roles.

Luzkarime: That's a very powerful example! ...In my case, last year, and for the first time at school, we decided the English Day would be focused on Colombia as a multicultural country. Students were invited to highlight different regional cultures of Colombia through researching and presenting history, food, dances, beliefs, and linguistic diversity...This year, our celebration of Saint Valentine's Day was an opportunity to challenge this northern practice, consumerism and the influence of US culture in Colombia. We decided to focus this celebration on the notion of self-love and self-care. Students wrote letters or notes to themselves, and we practiced some breathing exercises to foster body-mind connection for increased awareness and peace with themselves.

Another way of incorporating decoloniality in English learning has been through the implementation of classroom projects. Last year, for instance, my 10th graders' class worked on researching Colombian traditional games (the ones our elders used to play when they were young)...Finally,

> considering the context in which we are teaching, we are currently working to restructure our English curriculum to make it more relevant and coherent with students' needs and realities, as well as the role the foreign language really plays in their lives… The pathway ahead is still long and full of challenges, but I hope it takes us to better and more relevant learning for our students.

Starting at the classroom level, all three of us have experimented with different alternatives to infuse our pedagogical practices with principles of decoloniality. At least one of us is now taking further steps to modify the school curriculum for English learning to cater to more culturally relevant and sustaining goals and content. These ideas are coherent with principles of Buen Vivir and critical radical love in that they show a higher commitment to care, compassion, and empathy in our educational practices. This commitment has been enacted in concrete ways: by creating dialogic spaces where students' voices and lived experiences are taken as legitimate sources of knowledge; by prioritizing relational pedagogies that value listening and mutual support over competitive dynamics; by integrating students' cultural repertoires into classroom projects as a sign of recognition and respect; and by designing activities that attend to students' emotional well-being, such as reflective storytelling, collaborative problem-solving, and collective celebration of achievements. These practices moved beyond academic outcomes to foster a classroom climate of solidarity, healing, and shared responsibility, embodying critical radical love in action.

Acknowledging students' and their families' ways of knowing and making them part of the English curriculum and

assessment can help nurture better relationships with our students and make learning more relevant and humane. We are aware that these initiatives are not comprehensive; however, they can provide teachers with concrete ideas for their journey toward decolonization of their English teaching praxis.

Another relevant finding from our encounters was the understanding that walking toward decolonial teaching can also impact other actions of our praxis. As can be seen in the following extract from our second encounter, the classroom physical environment is one of the elements that can see a change once we decide to challenge hegemonic discourses for language teaching and learning.

> **Luz Ely:** My classroom reflects the struggle and hope of a decolonial trip. There are worn textbooks stacked in one corner that do not represent our local realities but emphasize foreign narratives. There are posters from past English Week events on the walls. Some promote local, critical projects motivated by student experience, while others draw on international popular culture. As I sip coffee sweetened with panela, a subtle allusion to our cultural practices emphasizes my commitment to ground English lessons in local customs.
>
> **Luis Fernando:** This classroom carries echoes of resistance and adaptation. Scratched wooden desks reflect countless student stories, while a handmade bulletin board proudly displays student reflections on local folklore, alongside national curriculum guidelines. Nearby, a small shelf holds texts by local authors, rare but vital reminders of the importance of resisting foreign dominance in our educational resources.

Luzkarime: My classroom is spacious and bright… On the right-hand side of the board, there is a big white cloth background with the letters ENGLISH CORNER on it… This week, students created small posters on water preservation inspired by the storybook "We are water protectors" (Lindstrom, 2020). I invited them to creatively represent the message that resonated the most with them from the book. Some decided to illustrate scenes from the story, others combined text and image, and others reinterpreted the story and related it to their personal lives and their own relationship with water. From here, I can read, "Water is the first medicine", words passed from a grandma on to her granddaughter in the Ojibwe tribe, main characters in the story… I hope that exposing students to this type of stories written in English, from an indigenous perspective, can resonate with them and some of the realities of our indigenous communities in Colombia (e.g. the Wayuus and their lack of access to water). Thinking about the physical environment leads me to wonder: *how do our classrooms, class materials, and classroom discourses represent our decolonial pedagogy?* I think every choice we make should reflect our decolonial principles.

Becoming a decolonial English language educator is without a doubt a challenging experience. It is particularly challenging because it demands the whole embodiment of what it means to be decolonial with our words, our thoughts, our feelings, our choices, and, of course, our actions. The previous extract demonstrates that every single choice we make can make a difference in our students' opinions of themselves, their

learning, and their role in their social contexts. Classroom pedagogies infused with principles of radical love and critical positive psychology, which consciously aim at fostering students' Buen Vivir, can and should be a way of embodying the principles of decolonial ELE.

Discussion

The findings of this collaborative autoethnographic study centered on three key areas of focus: 1) reclaiming local knowledge: integrating local cultural practices into ELE fosters critical awareness and promotes student agency; 2) navigating institutional constraints: despite systemic barriers, dialogic and translanguaging practices create spaces for resistance and transformation; 3) fostering collective Buen Vivir: emphasizing collective well-being and critical positive psychology supports holistic development and advances social justice. We would like to further explore each of these areas.

Reclaiming Local Knowledge and Cultural Representation

The first theme highlights the importance of reclaiming local cultural knowledge and integrating it into English teaching practices. Our experiences evidence how national curricula, influenced by international frameworks like the CEFR, often marginalize local realities and prioritize narratives influenced by Global North epistemologies. By embedding local cultural practices and ways of knowing, fostering alternative discourses, and generating spaces for the discussion of situated social and environmental issues into our lessons, we actively resist these hegemonic structures.

Luz Ely exemplified that the integration of students' lived experiences and local realities into classroom projects, such as "My Community in the Future", cultivated critical awareness and pride in students' identities. Luzkarime's use of translanguaging and dialogic practices catered for students' socio-emotional well-being and made them more engaged in activities that aimed to critically evaluate and resist hegemonic texts about the value of their identities. This approach aligns with Freire's (1970) notion of *conscientização*, the process of raising critical consciousness among learners, as a starting point to challenge and respond to their social realities.

Navigating Institutional Constraints: Resistance and Adaptation

A recurrent challenge across all narratives was the tension between implementing decolonial practices and conforming to institutional mandates shaped by Colombia's national bilingualism policy. The rigid structures of standardized curricula, high-stakes testing, and Eurocentric materials often obstruct meaningful integration of localized context-sensitive content. Luis Fernando's reflections underscore how institutional pressures demand adherence to international standards, leaving little space for contextualized teaching practices. Nevertheless, moments of resistance emerged through the incorporation of dialogic practices and translanguaging strategies, as has been the case of Luzkarime, which allowed students to blend English with their mother tongue, fostering deeper engagement and understanding (Canagarajah, 2005).

A significant outcome of integrating decolonial frameworks was the enhancement of student agency and the development of critical literacy skills. By encouraging students to

reflect on their social realities and question dominant narratives, we observed increased participation, creativity, and re-existence. For instance, Luz Ely's use of multimodal literacy practices, including role-plays, posters, and discussions of local environmental issues, enabled students to engage with English in meaningful ways. These activities allowed students to articulate their own perspectives on societal issues, bridging the gap between global discourses and local realities (Janks, 2010).

Finally, collective narratives revealed a key factor in the struggle for resisting and adapting to institutional constraints: relevant, available, and situated professional development. One of the intersecting areas of researchers was their conscious and persistent willingness to pursue critical professional development opportunities, which have shaped their decolonial identities. Language teachers could highly benefit from programs that are bottom-up, grassroots, and collective, using their context as the starting point for preparing them to respond to learners' needs and situational constraints.

Fostering Collective Buen Vivir

An emergent theme across the trio-ethnographic accounts is the alignment with the principles of Buen Vivir (Mignolo, 2018; Walsh, 2005). Our pedagogical efforts aimed to foster not just academic success but also holistic development, including emotional, social, and cultural well-being. This was achieved by incorporating students' and their families' cultural knowledge, acknowledging students' lived realities, feelings and emotions, respecting the use of L1 as an affective tool to foster language and literacy development, among others. One central point in this philosophy is the understanding of our role in ecological harmony and the importance of fostering a pedagogy that

embraces care for ourselves, others, and the natural world. The narratives revealed that, far from being an abstract ideal, Buen Vivir became a pedagogical compass, shaping classroom practices in tangible ways: through community-based projects, multilingual storytelling rooted in local epistemologies, and ecological reflection activities that foreground students' relationship with their territories (e.g. community storying).

This decolonial re-centering not only challenged the dominant instrumentalist logics of English Language Education, where language is often framed as a commodity, but redefined English learning as a relational and ethical practice. Teachers reimagined their classrooms as sites of healing, interconnection, and resistance, where English served not to erase local cultures but to amplify them in pluriversal dialogue. Examples of this could be seen in the ways teachers embody pedagogies that challenge the status quo of English in Colombia, their own role as foreign language teachers; from the way they use their classroom environment and decorations to how they position learners in power to share what they know, to use their L1. Students were positioned not merely as language learners but as knowledge producers capable of articulating socio-environmental critiques and collective hopes for transformation.

What emerges from these narratives is a critical pedagogical stance where Buen Vivir is not a static framework but a dynamic praxis, which is adapted, negotiated, and reinterpreted within the constraints of public schooling in the Global South.

A Concluding Note on the Imagined Future of Decolonial ELE

Our collaborative reflections reveal that decolonial practices in ELE hold significant potential for transforming educational spaces in historically marginalized contexts. By integrating principles of Buen Vivir, critical positive psychology, and transformative radical love, we challenge the dominance of Eurocentric frameworks and promote more inclusive, equitable, and contextually relevant teaching practices. The complexities we navigated emphasize the need for educational policies that recognize and support situated, decolonizing pedagogical practices. When we think about the future, we see ourselves creating teacher-led networks and promoting collaborative research that can amplify these critical pedagogical innovations, paving the way for systemic change in ELE across Colombia and the Global South.

Luz Ely: So, what do we do with all this? How do we make this a movement?

Luis Fernando: We need to document these practices, write them down, and share them. We can build something tangible. Mora (2020) calls for teacher-led research in ELE, where educators actively document and publish their critical pedagogical innovations.

Luzkarime: Yes! What if we create a teacher-led network, a space where we share lesson ideas, reflections, and student projects?

Luz Ely: I like that. It's not just about resistance; it's about reclaiming English education as something that belongs to us.

We teach, share, and transform through Critical English Language Education (CELE).

Luzkarime: I would say it's about resistance and re-existence; decolonial English language education should be our call for a pedagogy of critical radical love and hope from the global South and for the Global South.

Inspired by the notion of radical love (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2000), we envision a future where English language education becomes a space for radical hope, a space where students and teachers collaboratively imagine and enact more just and equitable educational practices and social worlds. Beyond mere discourse, we have outlined three concrete efforts to translate this vision into action: 1) A teacher-created digital repository to organize and share lesson plans, multimodal student projects, and materials related to decolonial practices in ELE; 2) a regional teachers dialogic "encuentro" to share experiences, build networks of solidarity, and co-create context-based curricula and pedagogy; and 3) a decolonial educators alliance that sets up teacher mentoring, collaborative research and teaching projects, and advocacy for policy changes that recognize locality, plurality, and diversity in ELE. What we offer as the first steps into building a decolonial ELE or a CELE movement from and for the Global South are actions that are informed by how we live our pedagogies.

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CHAPTER 5

A Decolonial Perspective in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Chile: Lessons from Brazil and the Teaching of Portuguese

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Abstract

The teaching of additional languages in Chile follows traditional native-speaker oriented practices, in which the learner has a passive role, instead of practices that are porous to the sociocultural scenario where the learning takes place (Calderon, 2014). The present chapter describes the approaches that have been used in the teaching of languages in Chile and Brazil, from the perspectives of Decolonial Pedagogy (Walsh, 2013), a Freirean perspective (Freire, 1970, 1978, 1985), an anti-racist proposal based on sociogeny (Fanon, 1967), and a foundation on positive psychology (PP) as a way to construct meaningful learning while fostering virtues and wellbeing (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The chapter delineates a decolonial proposal for the teaching of English as a foreign language that emphasizes teaching as transformative action, promoting the learner's

integration into a network of cultural meanings, for the joint construction of critical knowledge of language and culture, giving priority to historically silenced voices.

Keywords: decolonial pedagogy, teaching of additional languages, critical applied linguistics, anti-racist education, Latin America

Introduction

The teaching and learning of additional languages —including second, foreign, or heritage languages— are evidently necessary activities that foster participation of citizens in global scenarios through intercultural communication. This participation, however, is mainly carried out in English, which is by far the most used language in online publication of information, with 49 percent of all content online published in this language, followed by Spanish with only 6 percent (*Most Used Languages Online by Share of Websites 2025 | Statista*, n.d.). Considering this, it is no wonder that many non-English-speaking countries choose English as a priority in their formal education processes. Even though the reasons for teaching and learning English have greatly varied over the years, there is evidence of English teaching and learning materials as early as the final quarter of the eighteenth century (Crystal, 2003). As a result of this sustained effort to teach it with varying purposes over about 250 years of history, nowadays English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speakers greatly outnumber speakers of English as a native language (Al-Mutairi, 2020; Kachru, 1985, 1992).

On the other hand, the learning of foreign languages is a complex and non-linear process; it implies several personal, social, and cultural factors that are interwoven in each learning

experience (Brown, 2014). Motivation, for example, is an affective variable that greatly changes depending on whether it is a first, second, foreign, or heritage language. Moreover, there are several perspectives and definitions of this construct that encompass different cognitive, affective, and behavioural variables (Lăpădat & Lăpădat, 2023). Dominant approaches to English language teaching tend to prioritize communicative competence over isolated elements such as grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation (Qasserras, 2023). This shift requires learners to engage in interactive meaning-making and negotiation of meaning, rather than simply aiming for linguistic accuracy. This is problematic for two reasons. First, communicative emphasis poses additional challenges in contexts where learners have limited access to real-life opportunities to use the target language (Curinao Cossio & González Troncoso, 2008). Secondly, this socially interactive perspective can clash with prevailing political and educational discourses, particularly in Chile, which are shaped by neoliberal policies and tend to frame English primarily as a tool for economic advancement, rather than as a medium for intercultural exchange (Barahona et al., 2024; Glas, 2008).

Considering the various personal, social, cultural, and linguistic variables that permeate the language-learning process, it seems curious that the expected outcomes of the learning of the language is not a reflection of this diversity, but rather a normative native-like proficiency. In many countries, Chile included, English is taught with the aspiration to imitate native-speaker norms. All the material for the teaching of EFL comes from publishing houses in the UK and the US (Soto-Molina & Méndez, 2020), the latter being the only colonized country nowadays that boasts its own variety being considered as one of the norms (Baum et al., 2023). This fact can be attributed to the

importance of the USA for global affairs. Unfortunately, the same is not true for other countries where English is the official language (for example, Scotland, Ireland, India), and much less for countries where English is the second language, or a foreign language.

In this scenario, it is inspiring to observe the experience of a country like Brazil, as we will see in the present chapter. In a similar way as the US has established its own variety of the colonizer's language, Brazil has a similar story of resistance with the teaching of Portuguese, being nowadays the most important referent for language certifications for it. And, as we will observe, their experience of resistance in the teaching of the colonizer's language has transferred to the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. The awareness of the dynamics of power underlying language policies may very well be a lesson that Brazil can teach other countries in which there is no such awareness in the learning of additional languages.

The chapter will present an overview of the history of teaching and learning foreign languages in Chile and Brazil, the latter employed as an example of decolonial pedagogy in the teaching of languages, to finally present a preliminary proposal which can distil the aspects of teaching that Chile may adopt as a country to teach English as a foreign language. This proposal has a foundation in decolonial pedagogy, and in positive psychology (PP), outlining not only the priorities and affordances of a decolonial proposal, but also highlighting the aspects of this proposal that allow for cultural responsiveness and representation of local realities. We consider that a decolonial and positive language-teaching pedagogy should emerge from the dialogue among and across the linguistic, social and cultural reality of the learner. This demarcation is extremely relevant to

delimit the idea that there is not only one proposal or one view when it comes to teaching, but rather multiple experiences, research and development of pedagogical proposals based on these. Thus, it is relevant to position them from where, when and to whom they are directed.

Teaching of English in Chile

Until 1770, there were 9 languages coexisting in Chile and one foreign language which was Spanish. That year, a regulation was passed to deliberately extinguish the use of languages other than Spanish (Fuentealba et al., 2021). Chile's Indigenous languages were aymara, quechua, rapanui, mapudungun, likan antay, diaguita, yagan, selknam, and kawesqar, of which, today, five have no native speakers, according to Loncón (2013). The author also asserts that this language extinction is attributed to the educational policies that favored Spanish over all other languages. From this point on, language policies in the country have responded to establishing Spanish as the official language, leaving Indigenous languages optional for schools, and only mandatory as a heritage language when a school has a significant population of Indigenous students. As there has been no social value for these languages, they are marginalized to this day (Fuentealba et al., 2021).

With respect to other additional languages, French, Italian, German, and English were taught as early as 1811 (Farías, 1999). The rationale for this choice responded to the main migratory movements at the time. As a result of this, French was taught in the center, English in the north, and German in the south. However, these languages were gradually absorbed by English as a result of public policy and language planning over

the last two centuries (Fuentealba et al., 2021; Loncón, 2013; Vivanco, 2016).

The crisis in the teaching and learning of English in Chile has been well documented over the last 15 years, with evidence from empirical studies, theoretical articles, and surveys carried out by the government, researchers, and other institutions (Véliz-Campos & Ehlers-Zavala, 2024; Abrahams & Farias, 2010; Glas, 2008; Yilorm, 2016). From a skills-based perspective in the dominant discourse (Glas, 2008), it is clear that Chilean students do not attain a level of proficiency which is consonant with the hours devoted to the teaching and learning of it in the 8 mandatory years for public and private education (Gobierno del Presidente Sebastián Piñera, 2014; Vivanco, 2016). The analysis of these meagre results have been conducted from different perspectives, focusing on the methods used by teachers (Abrahams & Farias, 2010; Yilorm, 2016), teachers' preconceptions of the teaching of English (Glas, 2008), teacher education (Toledo Sandoval & González Hermosilla, 2016), and teaching materials (Soto-Molina & Méndez, 2020), among others.

Concerning the reasons for teaching and learning English, an analysis of public policy and dominant discourses clearly shows globalization is the imperative behind the increasing number of hours devoted to the teaching of the language, paired with efforts from the government and other institutions to provide support in creating experiences in which students can use the language in communicative situations (Véliz-Campos & Ehlers-Zavala, 2024; Glas, 2008; Gobierno del Presidente Sebastián Piñera, 2014). An example of these is exchange programs where native speakers participate in schools, or scholarships to spend a semester abroad. However, little to

nothing has been written about the reasons for learning English from the learners' perspective, which is crucial to develop the motivation to use the language communicatively. In this respect a recent study (Véliz & Chan, 2024) explored the development of student agency in a vocational school context as portrayed in their creation of multimodal materials, showing the importance of raising awareness on the issues of cultural and linguistic oppression and marginalization for the construction of the self and racialized identities.

Concerning the consideration of the learners' perspective, their culture, and their context, there is now a call to action for an anti-racist, decolonizing and humanizing educational system, with an emphasis on a critical intercultural education perspective in initial teacher education (Blanc et al., 2021). The authors' proposal is not centered around any particular teaching material for preservice teachers, but exposure to artistic and cultural material that can help them critically reflect on interculturalism and the questioning of dominant ideologies, which shows that teaching materials are a central issue in raising cultural awareness. This is consonant with the work of other authors, such as Aldayuz Henríquez, who states that to speak of interculturality is not enough, as it does not coincide with the social and political situation in Latin America. According to the author, speaking of interculturality would mean to believe that all cultures that coexist in a given context can inter-act or inter-confer in egalitarian terms. This leaves aside the problematization of racism understood as a system of oppression and its consequences (2023).

This is an imperative that needs to be addressed in Chile not only from the perspective of English language teacher education in general, but also from the perspective of the

methods these teachers employ, and the materials they have available to teach the language (Kumaravadivelu, 2016). In terms of methods, studies claim that interventions are usually based on techniques and mechanisms that replicate what has already been tried in other parts of the world – especially in the global north. These, consequently, still have a Eurocentric approach, meaning to perpetuate, consciously or unconsciously, what is desired to be eradicated: colonial racism (Aldayuz Henríquez, 2023). Other studies assert that the change in methods needs to place emphasis on metacognitive and reflective activities rather than teacher-centered ones. For example, the use of study groups and journals as reflective instruments proved useful in developing intercultural communicative competence awareness, challenging ethnocentric notions in the study of English (Cuartas Álvarez, 2020). This also includes a perspective of creating awareness in students, holding that "any attempt to promote the learning of languages needs to uncover the colonial mechanisms and practices present and promoted within the curriculum" (Soto Molina & Méndez Rivera, 2022, p. 302).

In terms of materials, a study of 6 textbooks used in Colombian universities through the identification of superficial and deep cultural components (Soto Molina & Méndez Rivera, 2022) revealed that these textbooks from multinational publishing houses, also present in Chile, have limited representation of local cultures, and mainly discuss superficial aspects (traditions, holidays) instead of deep ones (belief systems). Similarly, a more recent study by Véliz-Campos et al. (2024) employed socio-semiotic analysis and critical visual literacy to unravel the power dynamics and cultural stereotyping of indigenous peoples in Chile, showing that local cultures are represented as a minority, separated from the dominant culture,

and disconnected from modern society. In another study, Baum et al. (2023) reconstructed traditional textbooks from a decolonial perspective. One of their perspectives was to use the English language and academia to generate and circulate projects of epistemic and ontological decolonization rather than allowing academia to use decolonial content to covertly – as a sign of curricular progressivism – reinforce its own disciplinary logic (Baum et al., 2023).

As can be seen in this brief review of the issues facing the teaching and learning of English in Chile, the problem is multifaceted, comprising conundrums in terms of the purposes for learning the language, its methods, the materials employed, and how different cultures are represented in this target language with a critical perspective.

Teaching of Foreign Languages in Brazil

In the last 15 years, the teaching of foreign languages in Brazil has undergone important transformations related to approaches and methodologies, moving toward a more communicative, intercultural and recently decolonial perspective, as can be seen in the Curricular Base and state-provided teaching resources. These transformations respond both to changes in national educational policies and to contemporary debates in the field of Applied Linguistics.

Initially, the teaching of foreign languages was marked by a strong presence of the Grammar-Translation Method, focused on the explicit learning of grammatical rules and the translation of texts, neglecting effective communicative competence (Quevedo-Camargo & Silva, 2017). This methodology was limited in the development of practical communication skills and not very motivating for students.

Based on official guidelines such as the National Curricular Parameters (Ministério da Educação e do Desporto, 1998) and later with the Common National Curricular Base ([BNCC] Ministério Da Educação, 2018), Brazil began to promote a more communicative and intercultural approach, highlighting the importance of the meaningful use of language, oriented toward the integral education of the student as a global, critical and conscious citizen.

In recent years, particularly since 2010, approaches have emerged from Critical Pedagogy and Intercultural Language Education, which emphasize social, cultural, racial, and gender aspects, seeking to form more aware and critical citizens in the face of inequalities and Brazilian and global cultural diversity (Pereira, 2019). These perspectives criticize, for example, the hegemony of standard English and propose to include varieties of the language and diverse voices in the classroom, including literature produced by black and indigenous writers as a strategy for decolonial language teaching (Mota-Pereira, 2024).

Currently, the decolonial approach is gaining significant space in Brazil, questioning Eurocentric cultural and linguistic supremacy in teaching materials and methods (Maldonado-Torres, 2019). This approach seeks to rescue epistemologies from the South, recognizing and valuing local knowledge and the experiences of subaltern groups, thus promoting critical, emancipatory, and inclusive linguistic teaching.

Reflections from the Teaching of Portuguese in Latin America

Historically, the first project to teach Portuguese and Spanish as foreign languages (*Português Língua Estrangeira* [PLE] and *Espanhol Língua Estrangeira* [ELE], respectively) took place in

the process of colonization in our Latin American territories, based on catechization, linguistic imposition and acculturation promoted by the Jesuits and settlers who arrived. In the particular case of Portuguese, it is in 1940, with the formation of the Institute of Uruguayan-Brazilian Culture (INCUB, Freitas, 2016), that we see the first initiative of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty) for the promotion of the Brazilian language and culture. From this fact, the need to think, research, and produce pedagogic materials for the teaching of PLE and PLA (Portuguese as a Foreign Language [*Português como Língua Estrangeira*] and Portuguese as an Additional Language [*Português como Língua Adicional*]) began to be generated, such as the publication of *O ensino de Português para Estrangeiros* (Teaching of Portuguese to foreigners), by Mercedes Marchandt (1956).

Another milestone was the creation of the Portuguese Proficiency Exam, CELPE-Bras (*Certificado de Língua Portuguesa para Estrangeiros*), by the Brazilian Ministry of Education, in 1993, which consolidates the Brazilian academic view toward the internationalization programs of PLE teaching in Brazil and abroad, considering that the exam is currently applied in 28 countries. In this sense, as a language policy, in 2008, based on a strong expansion of language policies in the Mercosur countries, the teaching of PLE became mandatory in the curriculum of Argentina, in the regions bordering Brazil.

Other relevant points in the promotion of PLE/PLA that cannot be ignored are: the creation of the *Sociedade Internacional de Português-Língua Estrangeira* (SIPLE), in 1992 during the II Brazilian Congress of Applied Linguistics; the creation of the *Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa* (CPLP), in 1996, which brings together the countries that have

Portuguese as their official language: Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guiné-Bissau, Moçambique, Portugal, São Tomé e Príncipe, Timor-Leste and Guiné Equatorial (the last two were integrated in 2002 and 2014, respectively); and the implementation of the Research, Education and Extension Program of the Institute of Letters of the Federal University of Bahia, for the training of teachers authorized to teach PLE, in 2006, marking the first higher education course to qualify teachers of Portuguese as a foreign language in Brazil.

These historical milestones and the strengthening of language policies for the teaching of PLE/PLA in Latin America have been fundamental for the consolidation of a Brazilian perspective within the field of Applied Linguistics (AL) and in contemporary discussions on foreign language teaching in Latin America. Authors such as Mendes Oliveira Santos and Almeida Filho emphasize that AL must be approached from a broad and comprehensive view of language. Mendes Oliveira Santos (2004) emphasizes that intercultural pedagogical practice must foster cultural sensitivity and provoke in students a displacement that leads them to critically rethink both their reality and that of others. This pedagogical approach is based on culturally sensitive and dialogic teaching that transcends cultural boundaries.

On the other hand, Almeida Filho (2002) states that learning a foreign language necessarily implies learning a language-culture. From his perspective, the intercultural process involves transcending the limits of one's own culture, allowing us to live the cultural experience of the other and simultaneously accept the other in our own cultural environment. For Almeida Filho, the cultural element is not merely ornamental but constitutes the essential gateway to learning foreign languages.

In sum, the language policies promoted by Brazil in recent decades have allowed a critical, intercultural and decolonial approach in the teaching of foreign languages, developing a more critical view of applied linguistics, promoting a pedagogy where culture is the gateway to the process of acquiring another language, understanding that only through cultural exchange can we get to know each other, understand each other and solve the possible linguistic conflicts inherent in communication.

Established Methods and Approaches for the Teaching of English

The process of teaching English in Chile has been dominated by traditional methodologies centered on the native speaker, where the role of the student is passive, and the language is conceived as a fixed code that must be acquired through imitation and repetition. These practices, inherited from Eurocentric models, prioritize grammatical correctness and the acquisition of linguistic structures unrelated to the sociocultural contexts where learning processes occur. In this sense, the grammar-translation method and the audiolingual approach have been predominant in formal education, promoting an instrumental relationship with the language and relegating the diversity of variants and uses of the language to a secondary level (Orrego Ramírez et al., 2022; Vivanco, 2016).

This type of teaching has contributed to the reproduction of cultural stereotypes, where English is presented from a hegemonic perspective. In this framework, the idea of a canonical and homogeneous culture is reinforced, making the multilingual and multicultural realities of Latin America invisible (Walsh, 2013). In addition, the methodological models applied have been, for the most part, incongruent with Latin American educational

contexts. The uncritical importation of communicative approaches developed in other latitudes has generated mismatches between the pedagogical materials and the reality of the students, who often do not find representation in the discourses and practices proposed. In this sense, language teaching in Chile requires a critical rethinking that takes into account the cultural and linguistic diversity of the region, incorporating methodologies that dialogue with the local context and promote a more inclusive and meaningful pedagogy (Freire, 2005).

In order to move toward a more equitable and representative model of language teaching, it is essential to adopt decolonial perspectives that challenge the hierarchies imposed by the western educational tradition as a form of resistance, with the understanding that the issues of marginalization require profound institutional changes (Rosa & Flores, 2021; Mignolo, 2005). This approach allows us to rethink the role of the learner as an active subject in the construction of knowledge, recognizing their history, identity and agency in the learning process. Consequently, there is a need to develop more dialogic and participatory methodologies, where language is not only an object of study, but a means for the understanding and transformation of the social world (Freire, 1970).

The disconnection with the student's sociocultural environment is one of the main consequences of these traditional methodologies. This has been amply documented, showing a growing concern around initial teacher education, particularly concerning education in language-teaching methods (Barahona & Darwin, 2021), the course structure of teacher preparation programmes (Gómez Burgos, 2024), and the need for diversity during practicum experiences (Véliz et al., 2024). By not

integrating the daily reality and previous experiences of the learners, the teaching-learning process becomes distant and not very relevant to their lives. This can lead to demotivation and a low perception of the usefulness of the language learned, making it difficult to develop a sense of belonging and to use the language meaningfully.

Likewise, these methods, due to their disconnection with sociocultural realities, bring about limitations in the development of critical and reflective competencies in students (Pennycook, 2001). By prioritizing the memorization of linguistic structures and norms over analysis and reflection, the training of autonomous learners capable of interpreting the language in its social and political dimension is hindered. Language teaching, in this context, ceases to be a tool for intercultural communication and critical thinking, becoming a mechanical exercise that perpetuates inequalities and linguistic hierarchies (Phillipson, 1992).

In order to move toward a more equitable and representative model of language teaching, it is essential to adopt decolonial perspectives that challenge the hierarchies imposed by the western educational tradition (Mignolo, 2005; Walsh, 2013). This approach allows us to rethink the role of the learner as an active subject in the construction of knowledge, recognizing their history, identity and agency in the learning process. Consequently, the need to develop more dialogic and participatory methodologies arises, where the foreign/additional language is not only an object of study, but a means for the understanding and transformation of the social world.

Dialogue with Decolonial Pedagogy

From a decolonial perspective, it is essential to re-signify educational practices and transform language teaching models in Chile. According to Walsh (2013), decolonial pedagogy not only questions the power structures that have determined access to knowledge but also promotes the construction of knowledge from the collective memories and daily experience of historically oppressed peoples. In this sense, the pedagogical act becomes an act of resistance, a tool for emancipation and the construction of critical subjectivities (Mignolo, 2005).

Decolonial pedagogy recognizes the importance of daily life and collective memory as fundamental axes of learning (Walsh, 2013). In the Chilean context, this would imply a thorough review of curricula and teaching materials, incorporating local narratives and making visible the voices of indigenous, Afro-descendant, and migrant communities. It is a process that not only modifies the contents, but also transforms the dynamics in the classroom, encouraging the active participation of students in the construction of knowledge. For this to happen, there must be an explicit emphasis away from the utilitarian learning and use of English as a tool for better work opportunities, which is up to now seen in the dominant discourse (Glas, 2008).

In this perspective, pedagogical practice is understood as an act of resistance that challenges the imposition of educational models alien to Latin American reality. Freire (1970) states that the educator and the learner must establish a dialogic relationship, where learning is built collectively and situated in the socio-political context of the students. This approach allows for the resignification of educational practices, promoting methodologies that favor critical reflection and the questioning of

the power structures that have perpetuated exclusion and marginalization (Freire, 2005).

Foundational Theoretical Framework

Considering the revision of the history of the teaching of English in Chile, and the history of Brazil in this respect, with the emphasis on decolonial pedagogy, we now turn to the foundations of this preliminary proposal for the teaching of English from a decolonial perspective. In this proposal, there were three axes that we considered: a Freirean perspective, the anti-racist proposal based on Fanon, and a PP perspective, which will now be discussed.

Freirean Perspective

Paulo Freire's pedagogy is based on education as a process of liberation that empowers individuals to recognize their reality, question it, and transform it (Freire, 1970). His proposal is based on the concept of *conscientization*, understood as the development of a critical consciousness that allows subjects to read the world and act on it in a reflexive and transformative way (Freire, 2005). For Freire (2005), education must be a dialogic act where both educator and learner mutually construct each other through praxis, combining reflection and action in a continuous process of learning and transformation.

One of the central axes of Freire's perspective is the understanding of the dialectic between oppressor and oppressed (Freire, 2005). Freire points out that the traditional education system reinforces power structures that perpetuate oppression, reproducing inequalities and limiting students' ability to question their environment. A banking approach to education, where knowledge is transmitted in a vertical and unidirectional manner, strips learners of their critical capacity and keeps them in a state

of passivity. In contrast, Freire advocates for a problematizing education, in which learning is built collectively, recognizing the previous experiences and knowledge of students as fundamental elements in the construction of knowledge (Freire, 1970, 2005).

For Freire (2005), education is an emancipatory tool capable of generating significant social changes. By fostering critical thinking and the ability to question reality, the educational process becomes an engine of transformation. In this sense, learning ceases to be an act of reproduction to become a process of construction of meaning, where subjects develop their autonomy and strengthen their agency in society. From this perspective, language teaching in Chile can benefit from a Freirean approach, incorporating methodologies that promote reflection, dialogue, and action, allowing students to become language users as a means of interpreting and transforming their sociocultural reality (Freire, 1970, 2005).

This approach not only responds to the need to overcome traditional practices that perpetuate inequalities but also opens spaces for education as an act of resistance and emancipation (Giroux, 1988; Walsh, 2013). In a context marked by cultural and linguistic hegemony (Phillipson, 1992), adopting a critical pedagogy based on Freire's work offers a viable alternative for the development of fairer, more inclusive and meaningful teaching-learning processes (Freire, 1970; Walsh, 2013).

Anti-Racist Proposal Based on Sociogeny

Frantz Fanon (1967) introduces the concept of sociogeny to describe how colonial structures have shaped the subjectivity of racialized peoples, shaping their identity through narratives of oppression and dehumanization. Sociogeny emphasizes that the construction of identity is not only an individual phenomenon,

but a social process that responds to historically imposed power dynamics (Quijano, 2000). From this perspective, racism is not only manifested in individual discrimination but is rooted in institutional and cultural systems that perpetuate marginalization (Walsh, 2013).

Decolonial pedagogy based on sociogeny implies a process of relearning and dispossession of colonial structures that have conditioned the perception of the racialized subject about themselves and their environment (Fanon, 1967; Mignolo, 2005). This approach seeks to dismantle the mechanisms that have naturalized the inferiority of certain groups, promoting an education that vindicates the plurality of epistemologies and narratives (hooks, 1994; Walsh, 2013). It is an exercise in re-humanization, where learning not only seeks to transmit knowledge, but also to rebuild the self-esteem and dignity of historically marginalized subjects (Freire, 1970).

The implementation of a sociogenic perspective in language teaching not only has pedagogical implications, but also cultural and identity implications. Through a critical and anti-racist education, spaces for reflection can be generated that allow students to understand how racial hierarchies have influenced the construction of their identities. This process not only contributes to the decolonization of knowledge but also facilitates the reconstruction of a humanity that has been dehumanized by centuries of oppression and exclusion (Freire, 2005; Walsh, 2013).

Positive Psychology as a Space for Resistance in Education

Positive psychology is the study of human flourishing and the positive aspects of human experience as a supplementary

perspective to traditional psychology, which mainly focuses on human problems. It is founded on the pillars of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive social institutions, though the first two have largely been the focus in the history of positive psychology applied to the learning of additional languages. This research area has seen emphasis on constructs such as anxiety, motivation and wellbeing (Mercer & Gregersen, 2023). However, the authors warn, personal wellbeing is not independent from social wellbeing, which is why an emphasis on positive psychology must include the perspectives of social justice and social equity.

The history of positive psychology in language learning has been said to have two stages (Dewaele et al., 2019): A first stage started with the inclusion of positive psychology in second language acquisition with the work by MacIntyre and Gregersen in 2012. This stage focused on the identification of positive and negative emotions in the teaching and learning of languages, and analyzing its effects, and it attracted attention in journals in the periphery, with major journals rejecting these works. A second stage is said to have started with the inclusion of positive psychology into mainstream second language acquisition research, particularly in the second Psychology of Language Learning (PLL) conference at the University of Jyväskylä in 2016 (Dewaele et al., 2019). This stage broadened the spectrum of emotions to be studied, and also participants and contexts, including teachers, and also scenarios outside of the classroom. More recent studies have even focused on teacher education, such as the study by Oladrostam et al., which used the PERMA model (positive emotions, engagement, positive relationship, meaning, and accomplishment) to inform an intervention and assess results with reflective essays (Oladrostam et al., 2024).

The use of positive psychology, however, cannot be restricted to the study of causal relationships among variables to improve learning, at least not to resist the critical situation of the learning of English as a foreign language in Chile, where the emphasis is productivity, better job opportunities, participation in a globalized world, all of this from a monolithic perspective of native-speaker norms and culture with Eurocentric approaches and materials. Transformative positive psychology, on the other hand, examines the relationship between personal wellbeing and the social structures that frame it, from a critical lens (Mercer & Gregersen, 2023). In the authors' words, Transformative Positive Psychology

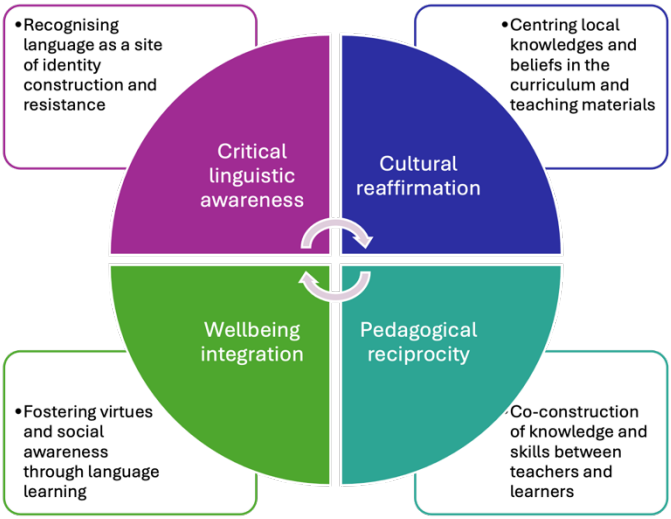
> is concerned with examining the interrelations between an individual's psychology and their experiences within the confines of social structures and systems with an explicit critical interrogation of the nature of that relationship and the roles of power, privilege, discourse, voice, and hegemony, and how these together contribute to an individual's and a social group's experience (or not) of wellbeing. (Mercer & Gregersen, 2023, p. 13)

Decolonial Teaching of English in Chile: A proposal

Decolonial pedagogy seeks to dismantle the power structures imposed by coloniality and promote teaching that values the diversity of knowledge and experiences (Quijano, 2000; Walsh, 2013). In the field of language teaching, this perspective proposes methodologies that recognize the socio-political and cultural context of students, integrating local narratives and challenging the hegemony of Eurocentric models (Mignolo, 2005), recognizing that these dynamics of power and privilege are social

and cultural frameworks for individual and social wellbeing for all (Mercer & Gregersen, 2023).

Figure 1. *Dimensions for the Decolonial Teaching of English in Chile*



From a decolonial perspective, language teaching should be oriented toward methodological innovation, allowing the active participation of the student in the construction of knowledge (Freire, 1970). Instead of reproducing traditional models that reinforce cultural subordination, it seeks to promote pedagogical practices that enhance critical thinking and learner agency (Giroux, 1988).

A decolonial view of language teaching not only aims to teach linguistic content, but also to transform and emancipate subjects (Freire, 2005). In this sense, learning becomes a tool for the revaluation of historically marginalized identities and knowledge (Fanon, 1967; Walsh, 2013). Teaching to transform

implies questioning hegemonic discourses and opening spaces for dialogue where students can build new forms of knowledge and cultural resistance (hooks, 1994).

This proposal seeks to consolidate language teaching that, instead of replicating oppressive models, contributes to the creation of a more equitable education aligned with Latin American realities (Walsh, 2013). Thus, the decolonial approach prioritizes the value of the student's culture and experiences, promoting learning that integrates their previous knowledge and sociocultural realities (Freire, 1970; Walsh, 2013). The aim is to provide contextualized teaching that strengthens the learner's identity and encourages their active participation in the construction of knowledge (Freire, 2005).

The inclusion and visibility of marginalized perspectives is essential as a central axis of decolonial pedagogy. It seeks to rescue and vindicate the knowledge of historically excluded communities, promoting language teaching that reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of Latin America (Mignolo, 2005; Walsh, 2013).

For the effective implementation of a decolonial pedagogy in language teaching, it is essential to diversify didactic activities in order to favor critical thinking and adequate sociocultural contextualization (Freire, 1970; Walsh, 2013). Some key strategies include critical analysis of authentic texts and discourses that reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the target language. Likewise, the incorporation of personal narratives and testimonies is valuable, creating spaces where students can share their experiences and perceptions about the language and culture from their own contact with the language. Another relevant tool is the integration of multimodal resources, such as videos, podcasts and graphic material that show linguistic

and cultural plurality, especially those that make visible personalities and themes close to the cultural realities of the learner.

Some approaches proposed from a transformative positive psychology perspective (Mercer & Gregersen, 2023) are: transformative learning, which challenges the structures and assumptions through which students understand experiences; transformative socio-emotional learning, which promotes wellbeing in all learners by promoting engagement in action to dismantle inequities caused by dominant cultures; global citizenship education, which promotes empathy, social justice, and valuing of diversity; culturally-responsive teaching, that makes use of the learners' home culture and invites them to question the representations of culture in the classroom (Donoso et al., 2020); and culturally-sustaining pedagogies, which includes actions with families and communities in the perspective of culturally-responsive teaching.

Equally important is curricular adaptation from a decolonial perspective, which implies reformulating traditional approaches to achieve more meaningful and contextualized teaching. This approach invites us to rethink language teaching as an active space of resistance and transformation, integrating local knowledge and students' previous experiences (Walsh, 2013). In this way, hegemonic structures are broken to promote an education that fully values cultural and linguistic diversity.

The implementation of a decolonial approach in language teaching can contribute to a profound structural change in the educational field, promoting methodologies that recognize and value the linguistic and cultural plurality of Latin America (Quijano, 2000; Walsh, 2013). This would facilitate the creation of inclusive and meaningful learning spaces for all students.

To achieve this, it is essential that educators and policymakers integrate critical and decolonial perspectives into educational curricula, promoting the creation of teaching materials that reflect this cultural and linguistic diversity. In addition, it is crucial to promote participatory and dialogic methodologies in language teaching, enhancing the active role of the student in their own learning process. For new participatory and dialogic methods and materials to emerge, there needs to be a sustained research effort in exploring, consolidating, testing, and validating the knowledge produced by teachers' practice in the school system. These methods, materials and instructional strategies already exist, and take into account the historical, political, and cultural demands of the context. This new perspective is empowered by the recognition that the application of traditional native-speaker centered methods is "a failed top-down exercise which has been functioning as the prime element of professional orthodoxy that is imposed on the subaltern community" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 81).

Finally, to ensure the successful implementation of these approaches, continuous teacher education in critical and decolonial pedagogy, and transformative positive psychology is paramount. This training should offer methodological and theoretical tools so that educators can challenge traditional structures and build more equitable and emancipatory educational spaces (Freire, 2005; Mercer & Gregersen, 2023; Walsh, 2013).

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CHAPTER 6

Transformative decolonial Practice in English teacher Education in Brazil: Lovingness and Resistance

Suellen Thomaz de Aquino Martins & Ana Maria Ferreira Barcelos

Abstract: Studies on love in language teaching are still recent (Barcelos, 2022), although earlier educational theorists had long emphasized love as central to pedagogy. Drawing on these perspectives, this chapter reports on a longitudinal teacher development project in northeastern Brazil, involving student teachers during their practicum and first years of teaching (Martins, 2024). The project offered a critical emotional space for reflection grounded in decolonial readings and local practices. The first author facilitated regular reflective rounds and kept field notes throughout. Thematic analysis revealed moments when teachers questioned hegemonic discourses and engaged in more critical practices, reflecting on English's role in their communities. These practices embodied forms of critical love and hope, contributing to decolonial perspectives in marginalized contexts. The study highlights both the challenges and

transformative potential of love, hope, and dialogue in language teacher education.

Keywords: critical love; language teacher education; colonialities; narrative approach; decolonial perspectives

Introduction

The colonial Enlightenment and the project of modernity envisioned the world as a unified entity, rooted in scientific rationality, with universal actions and civilizing ideals often tied to factors such as religion and race. Our colonial past continues to shape both our identity and aspirations, still seen through the lens of the white, male, scientific European perspective (Aragão, 2019). This historical legacy has long reinforced the narratives of Enlightenment modernity, Christianity, liberalism, conservatism, and even Marxism. Modernity, as a construct, functions as a myth imposed by the colonial regime: a system defined by vertical power dynamics, with a hegemonic center dominating global peripheries. This framework is inextricably linked to the construction of coloniality, which sustains these hierarchies and power structures.

The realm of language teaching is not immune to these ideologies (Nascimento, 2020). Even seemingly innocent beliefs, such as the idea of students as blank slates (Freire, 2005), teachers as sole knowledge holders, the ideology of Standard English, and the native versus non-native speaker dichotomy, continue to perpetuate inequalities. These beliefs, grounded in colonial ideologies, seek to annul plural histories and elevate what comes from the colonizer as truth, beauty, and ideal. They influence our emotions and actions in relational coexistence, subtly reinforcing the colonial status quo.

Such colonial ideologies still permeate our understanding of teaching and learning. For example, judgments about teaching practices, as the assumption that university students are "more up-to-date" than in-service teachers, coupled with language learners' fear of making mistakes, are rooted in patriarchal and colonial ideologies. These beliefs impact both teachers, who may lack confidence in their oral skills, and students who internalize the fear of speaking up.

The colonialities[15] embedded in social relations and our emotions perpetuate forms of domination, hierarchies, and exclusionary categories, such as the Western versus non-Western divide. This binary structure shapes the way knowledge is constructed in language education. Decoloniality, as understood in this context, is a confrontational stance that challenges hegemonic theories and seeks alternatives that move away from purism and fundamentalism as main attributes of coloniality. It invites us to rethink school practices and question the devaluation of other worldviews (Walsh, 2013). This process requires continuous engagement with alternatives to rethink and (de)construct meanings in teaching.

The theories of the Modernity/Coloniality group are critical for this study, offering a framework for reimagining teacher education and language teaching through plural logics that respect diverse subjects, cultures, and identities. By prioritizing knowledge that acknowledges the diversity of cultural

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[15] Colonialism refers to exploitative actions aimed at political, economic and administrative domination by the colonizer (Quijano, 2005). This logic of oppression and marginalization (Europeans as the center of the world, regulators of knowledge, the status quo of science, among others) of the colonizing subject that maintains the idea of domination at the level of ideas is what we call coloniality.

contexts and human experience, we aim to foster pedagogical practices that are more inclusive and reflective of these pluralities. As Souza Santos (2007) advocates, the horizontal construction of knowledge, with a recognition of contextual and local knowledge, such as that held by student-teachers and in-service teachers, is key to this approach. Walsh (2009) argues that decolonial pedagogy, informed by social movements of resistance, is essential for broadening our perspectives and challenging the limitations of modern colonial frameworks. This approach aligns with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, emphasizing that education is a socio-political process that produces and transforms knowledge through the lived experiences and struggles of those in a world shaped by colonial structures. Central to this pedagogy is the role of emotions, particularly Freire's concept of lovingness. For English teachers, being prepared for reflective, responsible practice is crucial. A critical perspective, which involves problematizing emotions and actions, fosters confrontational attitudes toward colonial practices in education. This teacher development process helps teachers engage with the emotional aspects of their profession, equipping them for a more critical and transformative approach.

This chapter reports on research conducted at a university in northeastern Brazil, focusing on English student-teachers, in-service teachers, and university educators. The primary research questions were: 1) In what ways can teacher education be problematized by considering the emotions and experiences of English teachers during their practicum and first years of teaching? 2) How do colonialities influence the education and

professional practice of these English teachers, who are situated in a geo-corpopolitical[16] context?

This teacher education research project aimed at creating a space for critical reflection, using narratives and field notes to analyze the emotional dimensions of teaching practice. A qualitative approach was adopted to investigate social phenomena from an emic perspective (Nunan, 1992). The study focused on the intersection of language and emotion in reflective practice (Barcelos & Aragão, 2018) and drew on critical (Borelli, 2018; Pessoa & Borelli, 2018; Rezende, 2020) and decolonial frameworks (Mignolo, 2005, 2008; Quijano, 2005; Lander, 2005; Walsh, 2009, 2013).

In the following sections, we argue that love, as a central human emotion, is foundational to dialogue and teacher education. We explore the concept of lovingness through Maturana's and Freire's ideas and outline the methodological procedures used in the study. Finally, we discuss how adopting critical practices in teacher education can enable teachers to experience critical love and cultivate decolonial practices in their teaching contexts. We conclude by considering the transformative potential of decoloniality and love in creating reflective and healing spaces within language education.

[16] Drawing on Humberto Maturana (2009), Paulo Freire (2003), and Walter Mignolo (2008), Martins (2024) views participants as **geo-corpo-politically situated**—that is, their bodies and places are intertwined with the social, cultural, and historical forces that shape how they see themselves and their praxis. This view, grounded in critical and decolonial studies, challenges the colonization of bodies, minds, and emotions that stems from abstract universalism, and calls for recognizing **plural ways of being, knowing, and coexisting**.

Love, lovingness and language teaching

In this section, we review studies about love in language teaching. Although these studies have been increasing and come from a variety of perspectives (Barcelos, 2022; 2025), the concepts of lovingness and love have long been discussed in education, notably by Freire (2005) and Maturana (1998, 2001, 2002).

Drawing on Maturana and Varela (1995), we argue that dialogue and reflection offer opportunities to reappropriate reality, particularly the colonial and hierarchical realities of language teacher education. Maturana's ideas are crucial for understanding the complexities of being an English teacher, especially in relation to the epistemologies in the Biology of Knowing and Loving. Maturana's theories on the interconnectedness of Knowing and Loving, the human being as a rational, social, emotional, and biological entity, and the role of reflection in education inform this study. These perspectives on language and emotion in dialogue and the ethical role of care in education offer valuable insights for teacher education.

For Maturana (1998), love is a central emotion in human evolutionary history, helping us understand social dynamics as spaces of acceptance, empathy, and connection. Together with his then student Francisco Varela, Humberto Maturana developed theories exploring the interrelationship between language, cognition, and emotions. From the epistemology of the Biology of Knowing and Loving[17], the authors view emotions as "dynamic bodily dispositions that define the different domains of

[17] This epistemology offers a framework for understanding scientific practice and the cognition of living beings in which language, emphasizing the deep interconnection among language, and emotion. From this perspective, Martins (2024) suggests that our emotions shape and guide our actions, helping us to comprehend how our behaviors emerge within colonial and patriarchal cultural systems.

action in which we move" (Maturana & Dávila, 2009, p. 15). In other words, emotions shape who we are, what we believe, and how we act (Martins, 2017). According to Aragão (2014, p. 30), "emotions imply different ways of moving in the flow of interactions and relationships with others or with ourselves." In this view, "all human conduct as modes of interaction arises and occurs from an emotion that gives them their character of action" (Maturana, 2008, p. 30). Maturana and Varela emphasize the bodily nature of emotions and recognize that emotions emerge through interactions, specifically in the coexistence between individuals and their environments. They explain[18]:

> We live in the world and therefore we are part of it; we live with other living beings and, therefore, we share the vital process with them. We build the world we live in throughout our lives. In turn, it also builds us in the course of this common journey. Thus, if we live and behave in a way that makes our quality of life unsatisfactory, the responsibility lies with us (Maturana & Varela, 2001, p. 9-10).

In Western culture, dualisms such as reason versus emotion have historically shaped our thinking. The Western modern paradigm, particularly Cartesian thought, has promoted the prioritization of reason over emotion, viewing emotion as something to be controlled and monitored to protect rational thought. However, Rajagopalan (2010, p. 219) argues that recognizing "emotional reactions to language" is crucial for recontextualizing English language teaching (ELT). Learning a

[18] All the originals in Portuguese have been translated into English by the authors of this chapter.

foreign language involves a "degree of emotional involvement," (Rajagopalan, 2010, p. 220) and emotions play a fundamental role in teaching and learning. As Maturana and Dávila (2009) assert, in addition to being biological, cognitive, social, and cultural beings, we are also emotional beings. Our relationships and coexistence are shaped through language, and therefore, through emotions. According to Maturana and Varela (2001, p. 15), "when we change emotions, we change the domain of action. In fact, we all know this in the practice of everyday life, but we deny it because we insist that what defines our conduct as human is that it is rational."

Maturana (1997, p. 174) argues that love is the emotion that constitutes the social space necessary for cooperation and coexistence. He explains that our existence and actions unfold in a network of conversations: "the flow, in conversation, in a particular network of language and emotion" (Maturana, 1997, p. 172). For Maturana, love serves as the biological foundation of a living being's movements, and it is essential for the construction of learning environments that foster cooperation (Maturana, 2004). Conversely, the absence of dialogue cultivates relationships based on authority, obedience, and submission. Maturana stresses that "love is not a noun; it is a verb, a spontaneous relational dynamic" (Maturana, 1997, p. 78). Love, as the source of human socialization, coexists with emotions and manifests in conversations. It involves "acceptance of the other in coexistence" (Maturana & Varela, 2001, p. 96). Learning occurs through interaction, collaboration, and welcoming conversations that inspire transformation. Maturana asserts that being in a state of love signifies mutual respect and solidarity, where the relationship is characterized by the acceptance of the other as a legitimate being (Maturana & Varela, 2001). Becoming a

language teacher is a process that unfolds through interaction with students. When this process is rooted in welcoming conversations, it can lead to transformative changes, offering new possibilities for the development of teacher identity.

Thus, an empowering path for teacher development is through liberating conversations (Maturana & Dávila, 2009). Conversation is the flow of coexistence, the intertwining of language and emotions, and it is through this flow that we as human beings are constituted. We learn to become teachers through conversations, which help us become aware of our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Being conscious and responsible for our emotions and actions enables us to seek paths and "live and coexist without denying the reflective autonomy and action inherent to our being loving beings, which is the biological and psychological foundation of our ethical existence" (Maturana & Dávila, 2009, p. 45). This reflection arises not from control or submission, but from the dynamics of unregulated senses rooted in the emotion of love. This emotion propels us toward the preservation of the species and our well-being. Emotions guide our actions and shape the systems and environments in which we live (Maturana, 2004). Transformation happens through interactions and the flow of relationships. To transform systems and environments, we must reflect critically on our actions in these interactions, recognizing the patterns of behavior shaped by patriarchal and colonial cultures. These systems of control, submission, and obedience breed fear and insecurity, compelling both students and teachers to suppress their emotions and actions.

Freire (2005), in turn, views love as foundational to dialogue and as a key emotion in teacher education. Both Maturana and Freire emphasize action-oriented verbs such as

"hope," "move" and "talk," highlighting the importance of action in transformation. Freire contends that knowledge is praxis – action combined with reflection that leads to world transformation. He argues that emancipatory education requires active participation, thoughtful action, dialogue, and interaction. For Freire, dialogue itself is a form of praxis, love, trust, and hope. He asserts that there is no education without love, since love is integral to genuine dialogue. Freire (2005) states, "There is no dialogue, however, if there is not a deep love for the world and for people [...] Being the foundation of dialogue, love is also dialogue" (pp. 91-92).

Freire sees love as an act of courage, a commitment to liberating the oppressed, and an essential element of dialogical relationships. A pedagogy grounded in dialogue and love enables horizontal knowledge exchange between educators and students, fostering a democratic and liberating teaching and learning process. Maturana similarly emphasizes that love is not the result of socialization but its core. He asserts that "anything that destroys love, anything that destroys the structural congruence it implies, destroys socialization" (Maturana, 1997, p. 185). Love is the fundamental emotion of human existence that enables acceptance and cooperation.

In sum, although Maturana and Freire do not directly address the racialization of colonized bodies and minds, their ideas form the conceptual basis for decolonial pedagogy by challenging dehumanizing practices of oppression. Freire (2005) argues that love amplifies the voices of the oppressed and that it is an act of courage. Maturana and Varela (2001) emphasize the ethical importance of care and mutual respect, which produce acceptance. Despite their different epistemologies, both thinkers advocate for human development and socio-political

transformation, emphasizing dialogue, respect, and love. Their work offers insights into how we can challenge patriarchal and colonial structures in education, promote emotional engagement in learning, and foster relationships built on collaboration, care, and critical reflection.

Methodology

This study seeks to confront the colonialities that continue to influence our ways of being, feeling, and existing in the world. We agree with Walsh (2013, p. 67), that decoloniality is not as a theory to be followed but a "project to be undertaken". In line with Borelli (2018), we recognize that many of our practices are still influenced by remnants of colonial power structures that were historically established and are socially reproduced in various spheres of life. We believe that focusing on pre-service teacher education is a crucial step toward mitigating the effects of these colonial structures in the future.

Narrative inquiry was chosen for this study because it allows for the exploration of human experiences as they unfold in specific contexts, time, and space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), providing a deeper understanding of teachers' emotions and lived experiences. Additionally, it serves as a tool for aligning with decolonial pedagogy in teacher education, facilitating the process of "making sense" or interpreting phenomena based on the meanings people assign to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 7). In Applied Linguistics, several studies (Souza, 2017; Barcelos, 2020; Mello, 2020; Martins, 2024) have demonstrated the value of narrative research in investigating language teacher education, particularly in illuminating teachers' practical knowledge, beliefs, and emotions. Moreover, narrative inquiry empowers teachers by amplifying their voices, which are often marginalized in academic

discourse (Barcelos, 2020). By fostering reflection on lived experiences, narratives reveal how language teaching and learning are shaped by interconnected systems of emotions, beliefs, ideologies, identities, relationships, and challenges (Aragão, 2008, p. 296).

To collect data, the first author conducted six critical-reflective rounds of conversation (RRC) with pre-service and in-service teachers as part of a larger, longitudinal teacher development project (Martins, 2024). These conversations aimed to provide a critical, emotionally supportive environment where participants could reflect on decolonial readings and revise their teaching practices. The study took place at a university in northeastern Brazil, with participants at two distinct stages of their teaching journey: as student teachers (ST) during their English teacher practicum (Phase 1) and as certified teachers (CT) in their first teaching positions (Phase 2).

The critical-reflective rounds took place regularly, with three rounds during each phase. A total of 20 student teachers, one teacher educator (TE), and five supervising teachers (ST) participated in the study. Data collection began in March and concluded in December 2023. Phase 1 occurred between April and July, during the student teachers' practicum, while Phase 2 took place from September to December, by which time most participants had been certified. Only certified teachers who were actively teaching English participated in Phase 2 (five participants in total: Ana, Sofia, Rafaela, Laura, and Som).

All rounds of conversation were audio-recorded (approximately 50 hours in total) to ensure an accurate record of key discussions. Transcriptions of these recordings were used to identify significant research material. Due to limitations of time and space, this study selected a subset of transcripts, focusing on

narratives from Ana, Sofia, and Rafaela during the fourth critical-reflective round. These narratives were chosen because they explicitly addressed the topic of love in teaching, which is the central focus of this study.

During the RRCs, the participants engaged with several critical texts to stimulate reflection on the colonialities present in language teaching. To support their future planning during their internships and initial teaching experiences, the first author shared a video (Chimamanda Adichie's "The Danger of a Single Story") in which the Nigerian author discusses the impact of singular narratives imposed on certain peoples. Additionally, three articles were shared (Leite and Paravisine, 2022; Almeida, 2022; Silva et al, 2022), offering practical approaches to addressing social issues in English teaching from a critical and decolonial perspective:

The first and third texts were the most frequently mentioned during the RRCs. The first article proposed pedagogical activities for pre-service English Literature teachers from a Latin American post-colonial perspective, with an emphasis on integrating themes of (de)coloniality in English language teaching. The third article discussed the use of digital technologies in emergency remote teaching (ERT) from a decolonial perspective, highlighting alternatives to traditional pedagogical practices rooted in domination, exclusion, and oppression.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis (Pavlenko, 2007). Thematic analysis revealed several interconnected themes: (1) challenges in teaching practice, including lesson planning, use of digital tools and teaching materials, and adapting textbooks; (2) critical reflections on language ideologies, such as questioning nativeness, embracing

accents, rejecting linguistic perfection, and valuing linguistic and cultural plurality; (3) emotional experiences related to teaching, including insecurity, anxiety, self-questioning, and the desire to do meaningful work; and (4) structural issues, such as the devaluation of the profession, excessive workload, and gaps in teacher education that limit autonomy in adapting institutional resources. The transcriptions were organized by participants, and a preliminary reading was carried out to highlight key phrases related to emotions and responses to hegemonic discourses. In the second reading, patterns were identified by linking the excerpts to the field notes, with a focus on issues relevant to the study. Interpretations were then integrated with the theoretical framework adopted in this research.

Results and Discussion

In this section, we present discussions from the fourth round of conversations with certified teachers (CTs). We specifically analyze excerpts from the narratives of Ana, Sofia, and Rafaela to highlight key emotional aspects involved in questioning hegemonic discourses and adopting more critical practices in their English classrooms. Our analysis is also informed by field notes taken during these critical sessions.

In one of the meetings, drawing on the previously mentioned texts, we reflected on the possibilities of teaching English from a critical and decolonial perspective, using shared textual and audiovisual resources. Our discussions centered on different ways of doing, seeing, thinking, and knowing, while taking into account the localized demands and contexts in which the teachers were working. Regarding the first text (Leite & Paravisine, 2022), Sofia shared that the activity proposed, although inspired by different contexts, sparked her interest in

designing lessons with a focus on social critique and non-hegemonic accents. She stated:

> When I saw this plan in the text, I thought, 'Wow! *Slumdog Millionaire* is one of my favorite films, and I never thought about showing it to my students in the classroom.' And I've always noticed this actor's distinctive accent [...] I think I'm going to work on that with my students. It made me realize how important it is to discuss other English speakers beyond those who are always legitimized. (RRC4 – Sofia)

Learning occurs through processes of transformation, fostered by living and reflecting together (Coelho, 2011) and through the conversational networks that shape human experience (Maturana, 2009). According to Maturana (2009), learning involves engagement in three interconnected domains: knowledge (what one knows), understanding (a deeper and more meaningful comprehension), and action (the attitudes and practices that express this knowledge).

In this sense, the reflections shared during the group discussions reveal a broadened understanding of pedagogical relationships and educational experiences, enabling the collective construction of alternative ways to reflect on and engage with English language teaching and learning. As they shared concerns, doubts, accomplishments, and joys, the pre-service teachers exchanged lesson plans and experiences, while also critically examining the impact of their initial teacher education on their developing practices.

Sofia's reflection illustrates this shift in awareness and resonates with Mignolo and Walsh's (2018) argument that

decolonial analysis requires a critical examination of the self and one's pedagogical choices. This new awareness awakened in her a desire to adopt decolonial approaches to language teaching, aiming to expand students' understanding of English beyond traditional linguistic norms. As she puts it: "I feel really grateful for having been exposed to this kind of deconstruction, you know, the idea that there isn't a [single] standard for the language" (RRC4 – Sofia).

Similarly, in the discussion of the third text (Silva, Zenha, & Oliveira, 2022), Rafaela highlighted the following quote: "Assuming decolonial pedagogical intentions means conceiving a critical pedagogy that is dialogical, transformative, and values the voices of social/cultural subjects" (p. 399). She connected this idea to the teaching profession and to educators who strive to go beyond surface-level practices. In her words:

> This quote, in my view, reflects the courage of the teacher who goes beyond the basics, who truly dedicates themselves, plans, thinks, and rethinks. I believe those of us engaged in the anti-colonial/decolonial cause face even greater challenges, and what we plan and reflect on is truly an act of courage. (RRC4 – Rafaela)

Rafaela's comment resonates with Freire's concept of love as a commitment to the cause of liberation. For Freire (1987), love is a dialogical and courageous act, an idea that Rafaela also associates with teaching. For her, love and courage are essential components of a decolonial pedagogical stance. Reflecting on her experiences, she also emphasized the importance of context in teaching and the barriers teachers face when attempting to adapt lessons to address social issues. As she explained:

> Experiencing other teaching contexts made me realize how different perspectives and worlds can be. It's not always easy to plan or feel confident when dealing with such issues. (RRC4 – Rafaela).

Like Rafaela, Ana, also acknowledged the challenge of encountering unfamiliar realities in the classroom. In the first round of conversations, she expressed her surprise at the contrast between her own life and that of a student who worked as a bricklayer's assistant. According to her: "At first, I had a reality check. I kept telling myself, 'Pay attention to where you are. This is not your reality. You've never worked like this, carrying heavy materials.'" (RRC1 – Ana). Ana's narrative highlights the importance of teachers' interactions with students from diverse backgrounds. As Pessoa (2006) argues, teacher education must include an understanding of how our ideals, interactions, and educational practices are shaped by social structures that reproduce power inequalities.

As evidenced in the reflective round of conversation (RRC), the dialogic process enabled participants to listen to different perspectives, including their own inner voices, fostering a shared space of mutual learning. For Ana and Rafaela, the conversations prompted reflections and shifts in perspective, allowing them to identify practices aligned with critical and decolonial teaching, while also recognizing the persistence of colonial legacies that shape emotions and learning experiences. Rafaela's reflection on teaching in diverse educational contexts further illustrates this point. She emphasized that working in different environments requires teachers to engage with anti-racist and decolonial approaches. As Rafaela put it:

> In a public school with Black students from the outskirts, the teacher, in addition to teaching English, needs to teach students to dream and affirm that learning English is important. On the other hand, in a course where students plan trips abroad, the challenge is also to help them cultivate these dreams. (RRC4 – Rafaela)

Rafaela's reflections reveal how language teaching transcends linguistic instruction by engaging with broader social issues such as racism, identity, and students' dreams and aspirations. Her narrative underscores the importance of context in shaping both teaching and learning; she advocates for a teaching practice that encourages anti-racist education as part of a broader decolonial agenda. As we discussed in RRC4, "Language teaching cannot be limited to instrumental knowledge but must recognize that teaching also shapes subjectivities and ways of being in the world." (Brasil, 2006[19], as cited in Oliveira, 2021, p. 83). From this perspective, teaching English should contribute to forming critical and socially engaged citizens, aligning with the goals of this research, which encourages language teachers to adopt a decolonial approach in their pedagogical practices. These narratives illustrate how teachers were beginning to step out of their comfort zones and envision alternative paths for language teaching.

[19] Brasil. Ministry of Education, Department of Basic Education. (2006). *Curriculum guidelines for high school: Languages, codes and their technologies – Foreign language knowledge*. Ministry of Education, Department of Basic Education. http://portal.mec.gov.br/seb/arquivos/pdf/book_volume_01_internet.pdf

These reflections also led participants to critically analyze the materials and discourses circulating in their teaching contexts. Sofia, for instance, highlighted the linguistic and cultural limitations of the teaching materials used in her school during her early teaching experiences. She noted how the textbook reinforced a singular linguistic norm: "The teaching material I received uses British vocabulary. So, even though we study cultures from other countries, the cultural aspect is still very limited. [...] And that really creates a limitation" (RRC4 – Sofia).

As Santos and Mastrella de-Andrade (2016) and Araújo and Ferreira (2018) point out, textbooks often uphold whiteness by presenting narrow representations of lived experiences, reflecting class-based disparities and contributing to the invisibility of Black communities. This reinforces stereotypes and silences cultural diversity.

In light of this, we ask: How many stories, voices, and identities are being silenced by these materials? How can we create opportunities for students to see themselves reflected in the often one-dimensional narratives presented in textbooks? How might we incorporate diverse languages and ways of speaking, disrupting the dominance of standard English, to foster spaces of belonging, intimacy, and intercultural dialogue?

We have come to recognize that adapting teaching materials is essential to engaging with the geo-historically and politically situated realities of our classrooms. In alignment with hooks (2008, p. 862), we affirm that "we must move away from conventional ways of thinking about language, creating spaces where diverse voices can speak in words other than English or in imperfect vernacular speech."

In this sense, we must prepare ourselves to go further and foster mutual support in this undertaking. We believe that this path calls for dialogue, critical reflection, reading, collective encounters, and the sharing of emotions, including the difficult ones, with a spirit of openness and care. In other words, it invites us to embrace lovingness as a form of social justice, dialogue, and critical inquiry. Through collaborative reflection on language, action, and emotion, we believe it is possible to challenge and transform entrenched beliefs, ideologies, and attitudes while remaining committed to (re)constructing our histories of language teacher education and teaching-learning practices.

We conclude this section by emphasizing the importance of teachers engaging in self-reflection to understand their emotions and interactions within the teaching and learning environment. This reflective process fosters greater self-awareness, allowing teachers to recognize their anxieties, joys, and sensations, and to transform these insights into more intentional and meaningful practices. By reflecting on themselves and engaging in dialogue with others, these pre-service teachers began to reposition themselves and approach their classrooms with more critical and conscious perspectives. The discussions were powerful in awakening their desires to challenge hegemonic discourses and incorporate reflective, socially engaged practices into their pedagogical work. As they questioned naturalized discourses and embraced decolonial perspectives, these teachers not only transformed their understanding of language education but also reimagined the classroom as a space of collective transformation, care, and resistance.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to explore the results of a longitudinal study with pre-service English teachers at a university in Northern Brazil. Drawing on a narrative approach within a decolonial framework, the participants took part in a project designed to critically examine and confront the colonial ideologies that shape our emotions, influence teacher education, and are often reproduced in English teaching practices. This transformative process involves not only rethinking the content we teach but also reshaping pedagogical approaches and the emotional dynamics that permeate classroom interactions.

The results suggest that these teachers were able to raise their awareness of colonialism in language teaching and find alternative ways to question this situation. Nevertheless, through reflection, decolonial discussions, and participation in a supportive community, they were able to engage with critical texts and conversations, question colonial practices, and identify more socially relevant and context-sensitive topics to bring into their classrooms. Additionally, their reflections indicate an emerging engagement with lovingness as social justice, dialogue, and critical inquiry. Overall, the study emphasized the importance of reflective practice. For example, Sofia's realization of the value of non-hegemonic accents and Rafaela's reflection on the courage required for decolonial pedagogies illustrate the potential of reflective practices in fostering more crucial and affective forms of teacher identity development.

We also observed how these teachers became increasingly aware of the impact of teaching contexts on their pedagogical decisions. Rafaela's reflection on navigating different teaching realities, and the challenges of addressing social issues such as racism and inequality, illustrates that teaching cannot be

divorced from the social realities in which it occurs. This insight aligns with Pessoa's (2006) argument that teacher education must critically examine how social relations and power structures shape educational practices. Both Rafaela's and Ana's narratives demonstrate that teachers need to adapt their strategies to the lived experiences of their students, recognizing how language can both reproduce and resist social inequalities. These reflections highlight the potential of reflective practice to foster a more context-responsive and socially committed pedagogy.

Through self-reflection and the evaluation of their English teaching practices, guided by anti-hegemonic perspectives, the teachers were able to critically examine the colonial structures of society. This approach sparked discussions that considered race and other power dynamics, allowing them to explore alternatives for transforming social, cultural, and political contexts. It involved challenging conventional power structures and reflecting on how these dynamics influence not only the classroom but also broader cultural and social contexts. The teachers' experiences illustrate some decolonial efforts in their English teaching practices and the transformative potential of hope and love in creating healing spaces for dialogue, initiatives encouraged by the teacher development project reported here. Drawing from recurring themes in the participants' narratives, such as confronting racial injustice, rethinking pedagogical authority, and valuing affective, caring relationships, we observed how teachers engaged with issues of inequality in meaningful and concrete ways. These thematic patterns reflect an emerging commitment to more inclusive and transformative teaching practices, where dominant narratives are disrupted, and students are invited to crucially engage with language, identity, and power.

By engaging in discussions grounded in love, acceptance, respect, and guided by the awareness that certain colonial legacies bring discomfort and pain, spaces were created for teachers to confront and challenge the enduring colonial histories that shape English language teaching and learning (Mignolo, 2005). These group discussions provided a space to reflect on the complexity of teacher education, examine the interplay between emotions and coloniality in the English teaching-learning process, and, when necessary or desired, take action to initiate transformative change (Freire, 2005).

The implications of this study highlight the importance of prioritizing a loving pedagogy grounded in social justice and equity in language education, particularly by addressing the construction of identity, power, and inequality through decolonial perspectives. Teachers often feel pressured to teach English in ways that align with Western norms, which can create a disconnect between students' lived experiences and the language they are learning. By reimagining English teaching as a space for cultural exchange, critical thinking, and empathy, we can begin to dismantle the colonial structures that continue to shape English language education and, consequently, our emotional and social realities. This perspective aligns with the work of Freire (1987) and Maturana (1998), who advocate for an education rooted in love, dialogue, and critical consciousness as a pathway to human liberation. We suggest that decolonial pedagogies become an integral part of language education, enabling teachers to reflect on their practices and consider how their teaching can contribute to social change and promote justice through anti-racist and decolonial lenses.

We believe that creating this journey requires open dialogue to reflect on language, action, and emotion; engagement

with critical reading and discussions; the sharing of experiences, including the difficult or painful ones; and an attitude of lovingness, openness, and acceptance. Through such practices, it becomes possible to challenge and transform entrenched beliefs, ideologies, and attitudes while reaffirming our collective commitment to (re)constructing our histories of language teacher education and English teaching-learning.

Declaration

*During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGTP [OpenAI] solely as a support tool to assist with translating the Portuguese interview excerpts into English, organizing the references according to APA 7th edition format, and help with language editing and proofreading to improve clarity and readability. After using this tool, the authors carefully reviewed and edited all generated content and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the publication***.**

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PART II

Love, Empathy, and Care: Healing Practices in Language Education

CHAPTER 7

What Palestine's Context Teaches English Language Educators: Lessons for Healing During Times of Precarity

Tina Jaber Rafidi, Nader Ayish, Theresa Austin, Rachel Grant, & Shelley Wong

Abstract

English language teacher educators from around the world document our spirited dialogue during times of uncertainty through transformAction to better understand and respond to the linguistic and socio-emotional needs of our students' embodied experiences from decolonial, anti-racist, and anti-apartheid perspectives. To counter scholasticide, ethnic cleansing, and erasure of Indigenous and colonized people, we critically examine ELT instructional practices. We provide examples from our own contexts using the concepts of love, hope, and healing as a possibility to transformAction. We expand our theoretical and epistemological understandings of English language education through engaging with Palestinian cultural and linguistic contributions such as صمود *sumud* (steadfastness) (Meari, 2014). We share transformative and theoretical resources we have found to be useful in our work.

Keywords: English language teaching, Palestinian education, صمود sumud, critical literacy, decolonization

Prologue

"Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is a commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is the commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation."

— Paulo Freire, 1970 Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Watching the horrific scenes of death and destruction in Gaza unfolding on our screens, one might ask, "What does love have to do with healing and hope?" Indeed, is it even possible to love during war? Although we have witnessed much silence and silencing by governments concerning the ongoing genocide in Palestine, we are also heartened by wide-spread demonstrations and outpourings of support from ordinary individuals around the globe. Such support is essential. Yet Israel has continued its relentless ethnic cleansing, killing tens of thousands of Palestinian children, women, and men. Multiple generations of families have been wiped off the registry as residential buildings, schools, and hospitals have been bombed and reduced to rubble. Food has also been used as a weapon of war, as a manufactured famine has led to widespread starvation amid a humanitarian aid blockade (United Nations, 2025). As English, world language, and literacy educators living outside of Gaza, each of us is connected to Gaza and the rest of Palestine in different ways. Two of us are Palestinian and have friends and family in Gaza. Others have colleagues and allies from Gaza, while all of us, including those who have no family or friends directly affected by the

unspeakable violence, are horrified by the ongoing genocide. It is not easy to capture in words the reign of terror that has been wrought on the Palestinians in Gaza, but we were inspired by the agency of everyday individuals to narrate their own stories directly to the world through digital technologies. As language teachers, we were moved by English language professor Refaat Alareer (2014) from the Islamic University of Gaza, who taught his students through the project "We Are Not Numbers"[20] to use English as a tool to write back against the imprisonment and erasure they were experiencing.

As we continued to watch in disbelief as Israel indiscriminately attacked and bombed Palestinians in northern Gaza, forcing young and old alike on foot to so-called "safe zones" in the south (where they continued to be bombed and killed), the images reminded us that this was not the first time Palestinians were displaced from their homes. Indeed, during Israel's creation in 1948, in which 78% of historic Palestine was occupied, more than 750,000 Palestinians were forced from their homes and ethnically cleansed. Like much of Gaza today, more than 530 villages were destroyed and depopulated by Zionist forces who committed more than 70 massacres as they terrorized and brutally forced Palestinians from their homes and land (Masalha, 2012, 2020). Given that 80% of the people of Gaza are the descendants of refugees that survived the "Nakba" or catastrophe that befell the Palestinians in 1948, it was not lost on us that we were witnessing a horrific repeat of 1948. We wondered aloud how our students might process what we struggled to understand. This led us to the conclusion that we, as educators, had an obligation to try and help our students understand events

[20] Source: https://www.facebook.com/WeAreNotNumbers/

like the genocide in Gaza and give them the tools to help them navigate and analyze their own well-being by making connections between the present, the past, and the imagined future (Aljazeera, 2017).

How is it possible to educate and love in the face of such brutality and ethnic cleansing?

As English Language teacher educators, we had very spirited discussions about educating with and for love through what we call *transformAction*. "Transform" is short for "transformative/transformation" and we capitalized "Action" to emphasize that love involves action. We wondered aloud about the disturbing events unfolding in occupied Palestine, what they were teaching us about love, and how we could use this knowledge in our respective classrooms in the U.S., the U.A.E., and in Palestine. For example, all of us have students from countries at war. We also have students with different political leanings, religious beliefs, and attitudes toward a host of cultural questions. This compelled us to ask a number of uncomfortable questions, including "What is love in an oppressive or abusive relationship? What is love in an educational context when not all students are included?" And, relative to Gaza, "How can one teach students love when they are watching an ongoing genocide livestreamed?" We found that Paulo Freire's concept of "combative love" (Darder, 2002; Liambas & Kaskaris, 2017) resonated with all of us because it is related to struggle and it is part of a liberating pedagogy. Fannie Lou Hamer, a workers' and civil rights advocate, epitomized this belief when she said to a largely white audience at the University of Wisconsin in 1971, "Until I am free, you are not either" (Blain, 2021).

As we addressed this work, our processes were both organic and systematic in our concern for justice and our desire to seek the truth. We talked openly and often emotionally about the unfolding events in Gaza and shared our conflicting feelings and thoughts on the impact that occupation and genocide has on Palestinians and the rest of the world. We scheduled bi-weekly Zoom meetings to engage in a dialogical process that allowed us to discuss the historical realities that settler colonialism and occupation have on the occupied, occupier, and witnesses to occupation (Fanon, 1963). From our spirited discussions, we identified topics and readings to share during subsequent meetings. We then explored readings linked to Palestine, teacher education, and combative love. We asked, "What does it mean to educate with combative love?" We decided to use "transformAction" to anchor our study group in social practice. Through this process, we identified several themes that emerged from the readings and then used these themes and our discussions to develop the five guiding questions we address in the next section.

Each question is followed by a narrative and critical discussion. The question responses are organized as individual and collective voices as we share our *life notes* (Bell-Scott, 1995), presenting insights gained through lived experience, teaching, and reflection.

The Context

We hope to make a connection to the enduring struggle against genocides that are part of the history of erasure. We offer several directions that are possible for those invested in transforming our practices into preparing learners to be agentive in forming a more equitable society/community/world.

According to Pitner (2021) *genocide,* along with its lesser famous sibling, *ethnocide*, was coined in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jewish refugee to the U.S., to describe the atrocities committed against Jewish people by the Nazis leading up to and during the Second World War. He states, "The creation of the words ethnocide and genocide filled a linguistic vacuum by describing a form of violence that was previously unimaginable" (p. 4). However, the systematic erasure of the language, culture, and presence of a people, predates the Nazi atrocities. We have seen this play out through settler colonization in the Americas, Australia, Asia, Africa, and throughout the Global South. The ethnocide of the transatlantic slave trade in the Americas was contingent upon the forced removal of Africans for the sole purpose of exploiting their bodies to build a society that involved African erasure, theft of land in the Americas, the erasure and replacement of Indigenous people with the White settler colonizers, and finally, the imposing of European languages, cultures, and religions:

> *The genocide in the Americas against Black and Brown bodies was by far the largest in human history*. (Andrews, 2021, pp. 26)

> *The violence enacted to clear the ground for the Israeli state is eerily reminiscent of the genocidal frontier campaigns to establish the United States*. (Andrews, 2021, pp. 133)

Similarly, genocide, as defined by the United Nation's Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), involves acts committed with intent to destroy,

in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group. Genocide is not only the physical destruction of bodies. There is also a symbiotic association with ethnocide that often initiates the processes of erasure of the land, ethnicities, language, race, religion, and culture.

In the next section, we present our five questions and author narratives. These narratives instantiate critical literacy as a precursor for transformAction. New London Group (1996), Janks (2010) and others also situate critical literacy within the socio-political contexts of school and society and offer a theoretical framework for critical engagement that fosters social justice and equity. As they argue, critical pedagogical approaches make clear the power dynamics across multiple literacies that "push" learners to question the status quo, engage in advocacy, and take *action* to challenge, change, and transform education and society.

Question 1: Is Gaza alone? What does Palestine's combative love teach us?

As authors of this chapter, we came together as a writing collective to learn how Palestinians endure life-threatening precarity and to see and connect educators in Palestine to those of us in other countries. Love is the driving spirit of our work. Black womanist scholar Cynthia Dillard asserts that, "Love is the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own and another's spiritual growth…Love is an act of will–namely both an intention and an action" (Dillard, 2022, p. 140). Contrary to passive or sentimental love, combative love is a love that calls for action, struggle, and صمود *sumud* (or steadfastness) against oppression as exemplified by the Palestinian people, particularly the educators and students in Gaza (Halasa & Elgrably, 2025).

Love is not about avoiding conflict, being silent, or pretending to be neutral; rather, it is about standing with the oppressed and actively working for their liberation. Freire re-defines love as a combative love “for those that are sure of the right and duty to fight, to denounce and announce" (2009, p. 147). Combative love encourages people under oppression to think from decolonial perspectives and critically reflect, ask questions, and take an active part in transforming the world.

Question 2: What are the physical, emotional, and spiritual walls/separations/boundaries that our students encounter?

Rachel Grant: According to Walia (2021), borders, an ordering mechanism that reflects “the interlocking ideologies of ethnonationalism, penal populism, welfare nationalism, and imperial gendered racism, operate together to solidify the relationship between the state, capitalism, and racism” (p. 9). As such, mobility within and migration across borders continues to be justified, restricted and contained along color, class, and caste lines. In a deeply researched and insightful treatise, Walia (2021) provides a painstaking analysis of the border regimes that make clear the processes, players, policies, and ideologies that uphold the systems of border imperialism within and beyond nation states. As Walia posits, “Borders are not fixed or static lines; they are productive regimes concurrently generated by and producing social relations of dominance” (p. 6). In the case of the settler colonial state of Israel, ethnicity, religion, and the dogma of racial citizenship inform systems that drive the political, economic, and spatial processes of dispossession, displacement, and deprivation. This fuels the politics of difference that rationalizes

and sustains the ongoing violence and genocide against the Palestinian people. Justifications to restrict movement of Palestinians on their ancestral lands, in the name of Israeli security, are eerily similar to laws used in the former apartheid State of South Africa, and mirror Jim Crow policies targeting Black people in the U.S. (Coates, 2024). Simply put, Palestinians have become *internal migrants*, as their movement, including the ability to attend school, work, receive health services, purchase food, retrieve water, visit family, and worship, is restricted.

Nader Ayish: As an English teacher and teacher educator, when I reflect on the walls/separations/boundaries my students experience, I realize that my curriculum mirrors the lived experiences and histories of children from the proverbial north side of the tracks. But what about those children from the south side of the tracks?

As a Palestinian American growing up in a small town 20 miles west of Cleveland, Ohio, in the early 1970s, I was blissfully unaware of this notion of borders and boundaries as a young child. Yet my hometown had real, not metaphorical, tracks that separated residents physically and psychologically. For example, on the north side of the tracks, where I grew up, neighborhoods were dotted with relatively large single-family homes where children played safely on spacious front yards. On the south side of the tracks, however, neighborhoods tended to be overcrowded with older multifamily duplex townhomes and apartments offering little green space for children to play in.

When I began elementary school, I found myself confronting a stark reality: I was different from my classmates in many ways. None of my peers, for example, looked like me, ate

the same kinds of food for lunch or spoke a second language. It was during this time that my sense of borders and boundaries began to take shape.

My sense that walls, barriers, and boundaries were in place to separate students based on their ethnicity and socio-economic status was heightened further when I started middle school. This is because my middle school was located on the north side of the tracks, but students were bused in from both sides of the track. My classes, unlike in elementary school, were now a mix of African Americans and ethnic whites. However, this was not the case with extracurricular activities. Most of my teammates, for example, who played football or basketball were African American, while most of the musicians who played in the school band with me were ethnically white. At the time, it was not apparent to me why certain peers dominated sports while others dominated music.

It was only after I began attending high school, which was located on the south side of the tracks, that I came to fully appreciate how physical tracks could serve as both a metaphor and a real division within an educational institution. For example, I remained one of the few students who were neither white nor African American. In addition, African American students continued to dominate sports teams, ethnic whites were almost exclusively enrolled in university preparatory classes, and I straddled both sides of the track, trying to make sense of it all.

As an educator, these experiences have shaped how I engage with barriers and borders, both physical and psychological, in and out of the classroom (Ayish, 2006). Sensitive to the needs of the "other," I understand that I serve as a gatekeeper relative to my students' access to curriculum that typically does not reflect their lived experiences or histories.

While I am not always able to alter the curriculum that I teach, I am able, through critical literacy, to incorporate the voices of the "other" in often subtle ways to help my students understand that the world is incredibly multilayered and complex and consists of many narratives that deserve to be acknowledged and understood.

Rachel Grant: Ironically, both Nader and I grew up with the same proverbial train tracks in the same midwestern state of Ohio, not far from each other but a generation apart. As a Black child, the daughter of parents who migrated north from the Deep South during the 1940s, my barriers were less physical than those of my parents, but decidedly social and psychological. Denied the opportunity to exercise the right, as a veteran of WWII, to use the GI Bill to purchase a home; my father still managed to buy a large Victorian house for his growing family in a well-established white neighborhood. Although we lived on the "right side of the tracks," if we wished to play with children who looked like us, we crossed to the "other side of the tracks." My siblings and I attended integrated schools with the children of black and white, blue collar, working class families. Looking back, and certainly by today's standards, no one, black or white, was middle class. Unlike the physical checkpoints that impede the movement of Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank, our borders were invisible but just as real. Throughout elementary school, the student population was well-balanced in terms of black and white; however, black children were less likely to be placed in the level 3 reading group, which ensured honor roll recognition. Our elementary school had a handful of excellent black teachers, but in high school, there were no teachers or administrators of Color. Our high school practiced "tracking" which meant that the college

prep curriculum was open to just a few black students. For those few black students, like me, fortunate to receive placement in the college prep track, we often existed as a singularity because rarely did we encounter other students in the class who looked like us. Fire workers, bus drivers, and elected officials were white and male. Black people could shop or dine where they pleased, but black and brown people were not employed by any restaurant, department store, or bank. From an early age, our parents let us know that although we had the right to play in public park close to our home, we should not. Our neighborhood park was where the white kids played and it wasn't safe for us to play there. The "black park" was several miles away from our white neighborhood, so my siblings and I played in the large yard adjacent to our home.

In the graduate courses I teach, several of my students have direct ties to Gaza and other regions of the world where settler colonialism acts to dispossess, displace, and remove oppressed populations (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). In spite of efforts to criminalize student voices of resistance and the attacks on academic freedom, I work to craft a curriculum that creates a space where teachers are guided in the ways that prepare them to draw from multiple histories, cultures, languages, and lived experiences of minoritized students. To this end, I honor the wisdom of Professor Algree (Imperiale et al., 2017) and stress that language educators should teach English as a linguistic tool, not as a replacement for Indigenous and heritage languages. Instead, English can be a mechanism to cross borders by allowing Palestinians to be heard "through stories woven by their own hands" (Coates, 2024, p. 232). To support the infusion of different voices and stories, I introduce my students to children's literature. Captured from a child's point of view, children's

literature increases knowledge of other cultures, broadens perspectives, and can facilitate the discussion of sensitive or emotional issues (Freeman et al., 2011).

Question 3: What are the wounds, fears, and worries that our students are encountering?

Shelley Wong: We opened our chapter with the questions, "Is Gaza alone? What does Palestine's combative love teach us?" We, who are living outside of Gaza, cannot watch the ongoing unspeakable massacre in silence. As we address the wounds, fears, and worries that our own students are experiencing in our classrooms in the occupied West Bank, the U.A.E., and in the U.S., we cannot ignore the live-streamed atrocities inflicted on Palestinians in Gaza. The suffering of students in Palestine and all students denied basic human rights everywhere cannot be ignored.

It is not easy to understand the emotional and physical traumas experienced by my students, especially when they are afraid or unable to express their thoughts or feelings. Designing curriculum based on the needs of my students has guided my teaching for fifty years (Wong, 2006; Wong & Grant, 1995). Over the years, when I investigated what students needed in order to succeed in school, I found that it was essential to know about their lives, their families and their communities outside of the classroom. We cannot address students' academic and cognitive needs without recognizing their whole personhood. Learning in community involves identifying, analyzing, and solving problems. Through learning in community, students develop critical literacy skills and are transported to different worlds and exposed to new ideas. They write as a form of discovery and self-expression.

Through speaking and writing, learners are able to advocate for themselves and for those who are marginalized or less able to speak up for themselves. Learning to listen to people respectfully and speak in ways that engage others and build community cannot be separated from our students' socio-emotional, spiritual and physical needs. Getting to know my students' lives in their totality is a multilayered process. For example, it involves connecting medical apartheid (Washington, 2006) in which there are totally different systems of health care based on racial and class divisions which occurs both in Palestine and the US (Barhoush & Amon, 2023).

Learning to Teach Under Colonialism

My first experience teaching English was at a Catholic girl's school in Hong Kong when Hong Kong was a British colony. Although 98% of the local people spoke Cantonese, English was the medium of instruction for all subjects except Chinese language and history. English was also the language of the government and the courts. My students' greatest fear and source of anxiety was to pass examinations. The school was shaped like a pyramid with many students at the base and very few reaching the top. Beginning with Form 1, there were five classes and only the "best" students—determined by their scores on school exams–would be able to continue the next year. By Form 5 there were only two classes—one track for science students and one for literature students. At the end of Form 5 the students took the much-feared HK School Leaving Certificate Exam. The School Cert Exam would determine which students would go to university. Due to the hegemony of English, under the British colonial system, the dreaded School Cert also determined life chances for employment. The mental wounds, worries, and fears

that my students experienced were so strong that during my first year of teaching, one student committed suicide.

The experience of teaching English under the British colonial education system profoundly shaped my view of education. The student's suicide, a response to her perceived academic failure, caused me to look critically at the problem of examinations, English language learning and power. She and the vast majority of students would inevitably fail, not because they were lazy or insufficiently motivated, but because only a small minority of her 12-year-old peers would be promoted up the pyramid from Form 1 to Form 5.

As I had majored in sociology, not English nor education, I depended on my Hong Kong local colleagues, who, due to their bilingual and bicultural knowledge, helped me to decipher my students' writing. When as a privileged native speaker of English, I reflected back on my experience of learning to teach under British colonialism (where English–not Chinese–was valued) I found that studying Cantonese and apprenticing myself to local teachers was an absolute necessity. Studying local languages and learning about the history and culture, and context is an important corrective to the "white savior" mentality that too often permeates interactions between expatriates and teachers from settler colonial nations and local students under colonial and military occupation.

After having my consciousness raised during my time in Hong Kong, I returned to the U.S. and entered the T.E.S.L. program at UCLA. There, I found it was easier for me to see with new eyes and analyze unjust hierarchical systems and structures which reproduce what Kozol (1991) called "savage inequalities" in U.S. schools. Over the years, I have been a teacher and professor in Los Angeles, New York City, and Washington, DC. Most

recently, in 2018-2019, I was privileged to be a visiting Fulbright scholar in Palestine at Birzeit University in the Occupied West Bank. I see many connections between the worries and fears of my students and my students' students–especially those from the most marginalized communities in the U.S. and Palestine. All students, including those more affluent or relatively privileged students, may experience significant loss, trauma, or marginalization. Freire's combative love means to support our students by getting to know them and their needs and addressing their wounds, fears and anxieties.

How do we take care of our students? Caring for our students involves caring about their families and their communities. We must teach each student, no matter how young or old, to care for others. Critical Race Theory (CRT)–which stresses the centrality of racism–is an important analytic tool for English teachers to understand how to better care for all students (Wong, Eng, & Von Esch, 2018). Intersectional strategies from CRT enable us to link the rights of all children, regardless of their status, class, ethnicity, and gender to an education. As we care for our students suffering from trauma, we, as teachers, must also care for ourselves as a part of the art and culture of care and liberation (Hadi, 2020).

What does it mean to think globally and act locally? We use the expression "Glocal" to signify that our local work is intended to act in solidarity with those who may be struggling against a common global oppressive system imposed by the U.S. and other oppressive colonial and imperial powers. As we in the U.S. attempt to grapple with understanding our own student needs, it is essential to understand that what they are facing in the U.S. is part of a worldwide problem. For example, as we see live-streamed U.S. weapons being used to slaughter innocent

Palestinians, we are reminded that the underlying economic system of what civil rights leader Jim Lawson called "plantation capitalism" (Lawson, 2022) is supported by ideologies of White Christian nationalism and Christian Zionism (Omer & Thompson, 2025)

Question 4: How can critical literacy provide hope in uncertain times of precarity through transformAction?

Tina Jaber Rafidi: I am often asked when and why I decided to become an English teacher. It was during the first Palestinian intifada (الانتفاضه الاولى) or uprising in 1987 against Israeli occupation. I was just a young girl. My mother refused to let me leave the house to take part in demonstrations because, like all Palestinian mothers, she was afraid I would be injured or killed by the Israelis. Sensing my desire to do something, anything, to support the countless young Palestinians confronting the Israeli military on the streets of my hometown, she convinced me that we could help the struggle for freedom by documenting the Palestinian narrative through translating the voices of resistance from Arabic to English. She suggested, “Let's collect all the political leaflets from the streets and translate them into English. This way, we can narrate our story to non-Arabic speakers.” It was at that moment that I wanted to be an English teacher like my mother. As an English teacher, my mother had a good read of the English-speaking world. As I helped my mother gather the flyers and leaflets strewn on our neighborhood streets and watched her translate them into English, I realized that we could teach the English-speaking world what it means to be Palestinian. I earned my BA in English Language and Literature with a minor in Translation and began my first job teaching

English at the same Quaker Friends School in Ramallah, where I had studied as a little girl. My mother modeled transformAction for me. I have continued to write, learn, and teach ever since.

Teaching as an English professor at Birzeit University in the occupied West Bank has been nearly impossible at times. Gaza's genocide has multiplied the challenges my students face in accessing education. I think of all these complexities every time I walk into my English language classroom. While I worry about the well-being of my students, I make sure to smile because I see the signs of anxiety and fear on their faces. The intensity of my students' feelings maps the number of Israeli military checkpoints they were forced to pass through, often blindfolded, simply to reach campus. Their "March of Return" from their homes to school is fraught with violence and brutality at the hands of Israeli soldiers wielding machine guns while my students carry books and pens. So, I pretend to be normal, but things are anything but normal. The Gaza genocide is like a silent death for me and others who experience survivor's guilt. For Palestinians, like me who live under occupation outside of Gaza, how do we teach English under the precarity we face? How can I teach my students about the Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world, while our homes and the homes of our relatives and friends are reduced to rubble and exist only in our memories?

The Palestinian people have never lived under one roof that they could call a "homeland" (Makkawi, 2017). They have never "shared a unified fabric with a well-defined geopolitical space as they are dispossessed and scattered across various socio-political contexts and communities" (Makkawi, 2017, p.1). The Palestinian people have been fragmented, dispossessed, and displaced due to the prolonged violations of settler colonialism (Fanon, 1963; Makkawi, 2017). To this day, despite colonial

control and segregation, the Palestinian people continue to struggle for self-determination, learning valuable lessons while keeping their focus on Gaza. Global communities need to recreate and rediscover lessons from the ongoing genocide in Gaza, reflecting on history to unveil the future. As Freire said, we must revive an understanding of the intellectual's role in humanizing society, employing the power of critical thinking in action to challenge existing boundaries and create new possibilities for the future (Freire, 1996, 1998).

One day, I changed my entire lesson. I started my project with my students, "*Gaza Narratives: Short Stories of Hope to Gaza*," using collaborative storytelling through photography, creatively integrating visual storytelling with writing skills by capturing real-life moments and transforming them into imaginative narratives enhanced with digital tools and supported by the pedagogy of love. My students were exemplifying their act of defiance using reflective journals and storytelling. They shared their stories, not just to remember, but to resist the erasure of their people's history. I ended my class with these words: "In our struggle, we see more than just land. We see memory, resilience, and a stubborn refusal to forget. No one is free unless everyone is free and can struggle for love." Despite the continuous war crimes committed by Israel, the complete destruction of hospitals and schools, and the lack of basic necessities like food and shelter, Palestinian teachers and students are committed to each other as they continue to teach and learn among the rubble of Gaza.

If Freire witnessed the ongoing war now in Gaza, would he consider the steadfastness of the Palestinians as a collective effort and action of courage and hope? Freire (1970) believed that the pedagogy of love would prevail because "No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is the commitment to their

cause—the cause of liberation" (p. 89). Undoubtedly, the profound idea of "I am where I think" (Mignolo, 1999) lies at the heart of the struggle for liberation as it speaks of the interplay between external oppression and internal freedom. According to Hashwi (2021), it is a false assumption to consider Freire's values as merely a teaching method. Freire's concepts should be recognized as a comprehensive philosophical and pedagogical approach to education stemming from his ethical socio-political stance. Darwish (2002), the renowned Palestinian poet, echoes this sentiment when he said that from this day on, he who does not become a Palestinian in his heart will never understand his moral identity.

Question 5: What are some of the ways/strategies/tools that individuals may use to help them learn under life-threatening situations? What have we learned from the occupation of Gaza/Palestinians?

Theresa Austin: In my own life as a biracial Okinawan and Black teacher educator and researcher, I have faced both anti Black and anti-Asian racism that pervades the U.S. in many forms. Our emotions are intertwined with our cognitions (Dalrymple & Phillipps, 2024). How can I love those who have historically dominated the social norms, institutions and language practices that are used against people unlike them in class, gender and gender identities? What lessons can address these tensions?

As a language educator, one possible response is to create classrooms that identify a gap in critical understanding. This can mitigate to some extent the scarcity that students face conceptually, emotionally and materially by providing tools to

build understanding of complex truths, from perspectives that are multiple. Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie* can be useful in recognizing how emotions create "a thick conception of experience—experience as world-directed, but as permeated with emotional, evaluative and agential dimensions, and open to reflective, self-conscious awareness and critical evaluation" (Bakhurst, 2019, p.10).

One important example, while in Mecca, Malcolm X (1964, p. 421) wrote to some American friends, "I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who it is for or against" (Malcom X, 1964, p. 421).

How might we incorporate brother Malcolm's insight in learning from Palestine? Advocating for justice in Gaza and Palestine is not anti-Semitic.

When people search for the truth, they may express solidarity against injustice even though they themselves are not members of the oppressed group. Recently, in an article entitled, "We, Jewish students, must not be silent on the genocide in Gaza," Tolajian (2024), a human rights activist and Georgetown University student, wrote, "In the face of unspeakable violence, Palestinians continue to show resilience and selflessness, and the world owes them solidarity."

One task is to ask, "What would freedom dreams look like?" (Kelly, 2002). Authors Gann et al. (2025) provide lessons entitled "Palestine-Israel from the Perspective of Civil Rights and Black Power Activists," which encourage the reader to engage in complex examinations of Islamophobic and antisemitic rhetoric. Similarities and differences become evident when these

oppressive rhetorics are compared to antiblack racism. Options to take action can be explored

One option is to provide relevant open-ended questions, which can unleash the desire to document and more accurately represent struggles for human rights and equality. In Palestine, a young child experiencing the loss of family members would need an environment of learning that provides some sense of security, and at the same time be engaging and challenging.

What does it mean for learners and their teachers to build that sense of security? A practice in critical language education is building learners' ability to encode their sense of being and telling their story using the available affordances, from oral to written to multimodal. Martínez-Alba and Pentón Herrera (2023) use wordless picture books that can serve to develop oral storytelling in either the first or second languages for peace building to resolve inner and outer conflicts. Teachers who promote learners' personal connection with their stories and the characters in others' stories foster meaningful engagement at the cognitive and emotional levels (Seidel & Rokne, 2011; Uduak, 2020). Here, too, is the recognition of "p*erezhivanie* shapes how learners connect emotionally to language experiences, influencing their engagement and meaning-making processes" (Uduak, 2020, p. 30).

This process of creating texts not only helps to create a learner's communicative agency but also evokes a response from the readership to consider various interpretations of the narrative. For example, one could ask how the issues presented can occur and how they can be resolved by collective action. Listening audiences can become "more empathetic…which in turn promotes peacebuilding, and, thus, social–emotional healing" (Martinez-Alba & Pentón Herrera, 2023).

For teaching adolescents and adults, we are obligated to address land rights issues. Palestine's creation by postwar Western powers harkens back to how empires have divided up the world to suit their economic and political interests. Parallel to the territorial dispossession occurring in Palestine are historical events in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples across the globe and across time. It is clear that this loss of land contributes to the diminishing of language and culture, interrupting the transmission of local knowledge, and can even become another source of intergenerational trauma (Estes, 2024).

Technology with tender encouragement

Lessons can be learned from Palestinian teachers. An interview with one of the English teachers in Gaza, Hedya El-Bohaisi (Alzraiy, 2024), allows us to see how precarity at every moment threatens the lives of teachers, students, and their communities. Within the scarcity of electricity, food, and even the bare necessities to live, Ms. El-Bohaisi's efforts hold negative thoughts and despair at bay through her comforting presence and reassurance that they will "overcome this exceptional phase in our people's lives." She communicates with her students by sending them educational files and following up to attend to their missed work. The impact of her careful attention to each individual student cannot be underestimated. She provides encouragement to build hope and optimism and persists in keeping her students engaged.

Social conditions that inspire futures for teachers and students

Given the state of uncertainty, Halat and Rafidi (2024) offer eight activity options for educators in Palestine to nurture a safe

classroom climate for learning to build "connection, hope, and strength." These activities have a wide range -from attending to students' social, emotional, spiritual and physical needs. For example, an opening activity encourages teachers to ask students simple questions about how they feel to acknowledge their emotions. Another activity, mirroring the metaphorical strength of the traditional craft of Japanese *kintsugi*, provides students who have experienced loss with broken materials and asks them to re-purpose and create something new. This act of repair transforms the broken into a creative work they can actually value. "By transforming damaged objects into meaningful creations, they reclaim agency over their experiences, finding beauty in what remains" (p.1).

Conclusion: How do we move forward?

In a biography of journalist and Black communist, Claudia Jones Davies (2008) asserts that during the 1950s, Jones, in her international efforts to unite workers across the demarcations of race and nation, saw that transnational and transcultural work is an essential feature of our contemporary world:

Our current geographical locations are products of multiple historical processes, many of which we have no control over, which have produced us, as subjects, in 'various nation states' of the world, having to interact with other similarly or differently produced individuals (p. 20). Black feminist scholar and activist Angela Davis (2016) suggest that oppressed people and their allies can no longer merely contextualize the oppression. We must see the threads of settler colonialism, racism, capitalism, classism, gendered racism, imperialism, and militarism that connect oppressed people across continents and across time. When we consider the specific case of Gaza, those

who wish to support the struggle for freedom and self-determination for Palestinians must begin to see the interconnectivity of struggles against oppression in Gaza and elsewhere. In 1951, supported by the Civil Rights Congress, William Patterson and Paul Robeson raised the cry of genocide in a petition to the UN, *We Charge Genocide: The Crime of Government Against the Negro People* that documented hundreds of cases of murder, bombing, and torture of Black nationals in the United States (Patterson, 1971). We must realize the histories of past connections and seek ways to reconnect. A case in point is the Black Power struggle in the U.S. during the 1960s. Stemming from their internationalist anti-imperialism, Black militants saw "themselves and the Palestinians as kindred peoples of color waging a revolution against a global system of oppression" (Fischbach, 2019, p. 3). How can we rekindle and strengthen the connections today?

As we consider what is needed to move forward, to push through and go beyond where we are at present, where can we begin in acknowledging, confronting, and ameliorating the crimes of ethnocide and genocide. In doing so, we recognize that the overarching structural systems of repression, dispossession, and removal are at work in Gaza and around the world. Kaur (2021) stresses that, "Since multiple inequalities determine our power and privilege and lived experience in society, these inequalities must be fought together, by all of us. Otherwise, we fail our movements and ourselves" (p. 96). An important first step is becoming intentional, to make clear how the systems of oppression operate globally now, as in the past, to dispossess, remove, and redistribute the land and resources of the indigenous and minoritized populations. Our individual futures, and our collective future, depend on it.

We exercised multiple processes by working together on this chapter. Readers may find these useful as they seek to challenge and ameliorate the roots of oppression within their own contexts. Overall, we need to see the connections between the past and the present. In response to the *Red Summer* of 1919, Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay crafted the poem, "If We Must Die." McKay (1922) wrote to stress the necessity for Black Americans to fight the crushing oppression, random murder, and unfettered violence against Blacks at the hands of White Americans. In 2023, shortly before being killed in an airstrike by the Israeli military, Palestinian professor and poet Refaat Alareer wrote the poem, "If I Must Die, let it be a tale," as an act of love and hope to his people suffering the ongoing genocidal siege of Gaza (Cobban,2023). No, Gaza is not alone. Somehow, if but through a kind of translation, an analogy, through the haze of our own experience, we must see the land, the people, and we must act (Coates, 2024).

Utilizing the resource of critical literacy, we should not look only at our differences, but our similarities. The outcome is one throughout history, and sometimes we fail to see what connects all of us. Critical literacy within this framework stems from Freire's socio-political stance and is grounded in fundamental beliefs about human nature (Hashwi, 2021). In tents, families, students, and teachers in Gaza were able to read the world and engage in a hopeful transformation through critical literacy, encouraging the recognition of shared struggles manifested in Freire's combative love for liberation as the ultimate action of Sumud.

As contributors to this chapter, we can imagine a different future, one informed by love, connectivity, and collective liberation. Kaur calls for a shift in consciousness and culture, "A

revolution of the heart…A time to reclaim love as a force for justice" (2021, p. xv). She encourages us to *push*, then *breathe,* as we strive to reveal a shared vision of our interconnectedness and interdependence, and to act.

We invite our readers to join us and search for similarities between their context and other places where the oppressed struggle. As you breathe and push, we hope that you will begin to listen deeply to quiet your own thoughts as you prepare to see and hear "the other." Deep listening was a process we engaged throughout our collective efforts here. Listening deeply, Walia (2021) stresses, awakens the senses and as a result, we can feel *empathy* for others. "Empathy is cognitive and emotional–to inhabit another person's view of the world to feel the world with them" (Walia, 2021, p.143). Within our listening circle, we shared lived experiences as narrative inquiry allowing each of us to hear the experiences, issues, people, and academic works that inform our perspectives, commitment, and approach to this work.

Liambas and KasKaris (2012) argue that the notions of dialogue and love in Freire lead toward social struggle to overcome fear. Freire is clear that education and cultural processes aimed at liberation do not succeed by freeing people from their chains, but by preparing them collectively to free themselves. This is dialectically facilitated when conversation is replaced by a dialogical praxis (Joudah et. al., 2021). In an attempt to move forward to engage in a dialogue as part of reconstructing the self, thinking beyond us becomes the core value of challenging oppressive systems. During the process of collective thinking for liberation to move beyond ourselves, we, the authors, realized that our transformative narratives embody the concept of صمود sumud glocally. In other words, صمود sumud

is a form of transformAction through international solidarity. We are not alone, and Gaza is not alone when we speak up!

If we carefully analyze lessons learned from our global and local past struggles, then we are fueled with the ability to move forward collectively toward liberation. The stories emerging from our individual experiences inevitably share much in common. We advocate for sustaining teachers' efforts to stay focused on their commitments to disrupt injustice by dialogic interaction through critical literacy. Sumoud is the force that sustains this commitment. Through our use of critical literacy in our language instruction and teacher education, we address different types of oppression, racism, and discrimination in different contexts. Consequently, this becomes a productive way of transformAction with our students. To conclude, what Palestine's context teaches English Language educators during times of precarity is that, despite the genocide in Gaza, صمود sumud will rise.

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CHAPTER 8

Love, Passion, or Toxic Relationship? Decolonial Love and Resistance in the Experience of Public-School English Teachers in Brazil

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Abstract

This study examines the role of pedagogical love (PL) in the experiences of two Brazilian public-school English teachers and a teacher educator. PL is understood as care and commitment to students' potential and well-being. While the concept has been explored in education, it remains underexamined in English language teaching, particularly from the perspective of public-school teachers. Against a backdrop of neoliberal policies and deficit discourses that marginalize students and devalue public schools, these teachers reflect on their love for teaching, their students, and their profession. They question whether PL represents care or a toxic relationship, as it can both sustain and deplete them. At the same time, they frame PL as resistance: through inclusive practices, they challenge exclusionary

narratives and affirm their students' right to quality education. By choosing to remain in public schools and adopting PL, they enact a decolonial stance in English teaching.

Keywords: Pedagogical love; Teacher emotions; English language teaching; Public schools in Brazil; Neoliberalism; Decolonial perspectives

Introduction

We see this chapter as a dialogue, a conversation between a language teacher educator and former students, who are now teachers of English who chose to work in public schools in Brazil. We have known each other for a long time and have developed ties which are also related to our similar views on language education and pedagogical love. I have always had an admiration for Raquel and Viviane (Vivi) both for choosing to become teachers and for teaching in public schools in Brazil as well as for the pedagogical love approach that I have witnessed them to have with their students.

This chapter is a reflective narrative of our dialoguing around the theme of pedagogical love in the context of teaching English in two public schools in the state of Minas Gerais, in Brazil. During the second semester of 2024, we held two face-to-face dialogues in which Raquel, Vivi and Ana shared their views on pedagogical love as we discussed what it is like to enact a loving pedagogy in their practices and what obstacles they face in their daily life. Two guiding questions oriented our reflections: What is it that constitutes pedagogical love for them in practice? What challenges do they face in teaching Englis in public schools?

The background for this study is English teaching in public education in Brazil. To understand this context, it is important to explain how neoliberalism has shaped public school teaching in Brazil (Fortes, 2028). Thus, we have structured this chapter as follows. In the first section, we review literature on neoliberalism and pedagogical love. In the second, we explain the methodology. In the third, we present and discuss excerpts of our critical dialogue. We conclude with implications and suggestions for further research on pedagogical love and language teaching in Brazil.

Neoliberalism and Deficit View of Teachers and Students in Public School in Brazil

Neoliberalism has become a dominant force shaping education globally, promoting discourses of marketization, efficiency, individual responsibility, and competition (Peters, 2012; Themelis, 2021). These logics reframe education not as a public good but as a private investment, shifting responsibility from the state to individuals and fostering a culture of performativity and accountability. In Brazil, according to Fortes (2018), neoliberalism is the background of public schools, marked by privatization, market-driven reforms, and an emphasis on efficiency and accountability. It has influenced English teaching in public education in, at least, two ways: by reinforcing a deficit view of teachers and students and by contributing to the devaluation and precarization of the teaching profession in Brazilian society. We explain each of these below.

First, neoliberalism promotes a "deficit view" of both teachers and students, particularly in poorer and marginalized areas. Teachers are often seen as ineffective or incapable of securing better positions, and they are frequently blamed for

poor student outcomes. Similarly, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, such as Black, Indigenous, or rural populations, are perceived as lacking skills, knowledge, and motivation. These deficit perspectives are harmful because they overlook systemic issues such as social class inequality, as well as race, gender, and social discrimination in Brazil.

According to Fortes (2018, 2023) and Lima (2011) the "discourse of failure" surrounding English teaching in Brazilian public schools is used to justify its perceived inefficacy. This discourse reinforces the widespread belief that the best places to learn English are private language institutes or English-speaking countries (Barcelos, 1995; Zolnier, 2007). Fortes (2018, p. 83)[21] links this belief to the "weakening of the State and the outsourcing of English teaching in public schools." This creates a paradox in English teaching in Brazil. On one hand, the overvaluation of private language institutes as the ideal setting for learning English contributes to the commodification of the language, portraying it as an "instrument" or "tool" that promises better job opportunities and privileged positions in capitalist societies (Fortes, 2018, p. 78). On the other hand, the dismissal of public schools as inadequate for English learning condemns marginalized and minority populations to an underfunded system where English is undervalued, with limited class hours and minimal investment.

Secondly, neoliberalism exacerbates the low status, job insecurity, and devaluation of teachers in Brazil. As Genaro

[21] Fortes cites the Project: “Centro de Idiomas do Estado” (CEI) [State Language Center], an initiative of Espírito Santo Government since 2009 that gives their best student a scholarship to study English in a different time from their school classes. Fortes explains that this follows the model of the private language institutes. See http://sedu.es.gov.br/Not%C3%ADcia/idiomas-sedu-divulga-resultado-do-processo-seletivo

(2024) notes, this stems from temporary contracts, excessive workloads, silent authoritarianism, reliance on rankings, and the erosion of collective decision-making. These conditions harm teachers' mental health and foster a culture of self-blame, as systemic issues are framed as individual problems rather than collective concerns. In the field of English language teaching, Thiessen (2021) argues that neoliberal discourses reinforce linguistic hierarchies, standardization, and the commodification of language education, placing further pressure on teachers to conform to external demands while neglecting local realities and professional agency.

According to Garcia et al. (2021), the rise of the far-right in Brazil has intensified challenges for teachers, including low salaries, systemic devaluation, and even persecution, with accusations of political "indoctrination." This narrative was fueled by the ultra-conservative "School Without Party" movement, promoted during Bolsonaro's government. Teaching remains one of Brazil's most undervalued professions, with teachers earning the lowest salaries among 40 countries, as noted in an OECD study. Additionally, Gatti (2010) highlights a teaching blackout – a severe shortage of qualified teachers willing to stay in the profession.

In this context, pedagogical love emerges as a form of resistance to the dehumanizing effects of neoliberal education, offering a counter-narrative that prioritizes care, empathy, and human connection over productivity and control.

Pedagogical love

Although pedagogical love has been discussed in the broader field of education much earlier (Goldstein, 1997, Määta & Uusiautti, 2011), in Applied Linguistics, Pedagogical Love (PL) has only

recently emerged as a topic of interest. The first article on the subject (Barcelos & Coelho, 2016) was published in a book on Positive Psychology in Language Learning (PLL) (McIntyre et al. , 2016). PLL opened the door to exploring emotions that had previously been overlooked in the discipline, such as hope, grit, enjoyment, and love. With this shift toward the PLL paradigm, more studies on love and PL began to emerge, marking the period from 2016 to 2018 as the "beginnings" of research on pedagogical love in English Language Teaching (ELT) (see Barcelos, 2025).

In this chapter we take a critical perspective on PL, drawing on Paulo Freire's revolutionary pedagogy of love. For Freire (1996), love is rooted in dialogue, commitment to others, and a belief in everyone's capacity to love, as well as their right to democracy and justice. It involves affection and proximity, and it encompasses what Freire called *ouvirtude*: the respectful act of deeply listening to others' ways of knowing and living.

Recently, interest in PL has grown, with diverse approaches emerging in research (see Barcelos, 2025). While much of the literature comes from the Global North, often inspired by Paulo Freire, we focus on studies from the Global South, particularly Latin America, that explore concepts like *pedagogia del cariño*. In addition, we discuss decolonial love. Although the studies on decolonial love that we cite here are not from the Global South, they are based on the premises of decoloniality. Below, we delve deeper into these perspectives.

The first group includes Latin American researchers who use terms like *cariño pedagogies*. Medizábal (2024) explains that these pedagogies focus on empowering minority students, amplifying their voices, and fostering agency within inclusive, caring, and respectful environments (Bartolomé, 2008; Salmerón

et al., 2021). The term *cariño* is preferred over "care" because it conveys deeper affection, warmth, and love (Pearson et al. 2021; Salmerón et al. 2021). Like other definitions of PL, *cariño pedagogies* stress vulnerability, trust, and agency, and, as Bartolomé (2008) argues, it is essential for addressing and balancing unequal circumstances. In this sense, some recent studies have related a PL to social justice.

Marcucci et al. (2024), for example, explore how verbal and physical displays of affection are central to Black feminist educators' understanding of love and care in pedagogy. Drawing on scholars like Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002), Case (1997), and Guiffrida (2005), they describe these practices as "othermothering", a form of care addressing both emotional and physical needs, such as food and affection (p. 9). Thus, the use of expressions like "I love you" work as acts of justice, countering the dehumanization often faced by Black students. The authors argue that dehumanization is a tool of societal control, and intentional, thoughtful expressions of affection, when mindful of gender, consent, and boundaries, can resist oppressive systems (p. 9).

A second group of recent studies have used the term "decolonial love," which is a relatively new term that can be included within the critical approach to pedagogical love. As explained before (Barcelos, 2020), critical theories of love focus on choice, action, justice, democracy, and power. Butler (2023) argues that "Decolonizing education requires a pedagogy of decolonial love" (p. 1381) and that decolonial love is a "radical pedagogy of care rooted in decolonial praxis" (p. 1389).
Davis (2019) explains that decolonial love originates in decolonial studies (Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Sandoval, 2000). For these scholars, decolonial love is a transformative force that confronts

colonialism, racism, and systemic oppression, restoring humanity by seeing and recognizing others as they are, not as they "should" be. It embraces diverse ways of thinking, being, and acting, while respecting individual choices. Davis argues that a decolonial turn "involves and necessitates the affirmation and evocation of love" (p. 115), describing it as a fluid, dynamic way of engaging with the world and fostering human connections between individuals, communities, and societies.

Other studies on decolonial love explore its potential to: (a) teach sensitive and controversial topics (Maluleka, 2023, 2024); (b) create just, inclusive classrooms through care-centered management (Holyoke, 2025); (c) support radical decolonial praxis in higher education, affirming Black identities amid anti-Black racism (Butler, 2023); and (d) challenge heteronormativity, racism, and colonialism through a queering approach in education (Trinh et al., 2025).

Methodology

Before talking about the methodology, it is important to provide a brief description of ourselves to help readers familiarize themselves with our narratives and our study.

Ana: *I have been a language teacher educator at Federal University of Viçosa since 1992, where I was also a student. Raquel and Vivi are former student-teachers of mine. Raquel was also my master´s student and advisee. I have worked closely with them as supervising teachers in schools for my student-teachers and thus, have followed their work closely. I admire how they work and I always try to work with them as supervising teachers for my student-teachers. We´ve always been in touch since their graduation. I have been researching*

pedagogical love since 2016 and wanted to work with them on this topic.

Vivi: *I am a very happy person, always striving to see the positive side of every situation life presents. Helping others and having the opportunity to meet and engage with different people truly brings me joy. I have been working as a teacher since 2013, even while I was still studying at the university as a major in languages (Portuguese/English). Ana was my teacher and supervisor during that time, and we kept in touch, working on the language teaching practicum and always wanting to write more about positive teaching (topic of my conclusion paper under her supervision). Through her, I met Raquel, a dedicated and kind teacher, who also has a deep passion for public education. I have been working as a public-school English teacher since 2017. I teach secondary school (ages 10, 11 and 12) and adult education, once a week. I love working at schools and connecting with students.*

Raquel: *I have been an English teacher since 2013. I have been working as a teacher since my undergraduate studies, like Vivi, in the same project at the same university. Later, in 2020, I worked on my Master´s with Ana, focusing on beliefs and emotions on gender violence in public schools. Nowadays I teach online and at a public school. I teach secondary school students.*

The primary data source for our study was two face-to-face dialoguing held in the second semester of 2024, each lasting about 1.5 hours. Without a strict guideline, the dialoguing flowed naturally, focusing on Vivi and Raquel's teaching experiences, challenges, joys, and their decision to work in public schools. The

first dialogue centered on their struggles and joys as public-school teachers, while the second revisited these themes, emphasizing their practices, challenges, and how pedagogical love helps them support students and resist systemic difficulties. Ana transcribed the dialogues, and Vivi and Raquel reviewed the transcripts.

Data was analyzed inductively, following qualitative research parameters of thematic analysis (Patton, 1990). Ana conducted the first coding of the dialoguing, followed by independent coding by Vivi and Raquel. We then met to reach agreement on the themes that captured key aspects of pedagogical love and teaching English in public schools. This thematic analysis led to the identification of five central themes, which structure the following sections of this chapter: (1) *Teaching English in a public school in Brazil: a toxic relationship?*; (2) *Pedagogical love enacted*; (3) *Affectivity, cariño and kindness*; (4) *Attentive listening*; and (5) *Teaching English as a form of student empowerment*. All excerpts are originally in Brazilian Portuguese and were translated into English using © Word, then carefully revised by the authors of this chapter. Minor edits were made to remove traces of oral speech, such as false starts and repetitions.

Results

In this section, we explore the results of our critical dialoguing, focusing on Vivi and Raquel's experiences as public-school teachers in Brazil. Their emotions, beliefs, and practices of pedagogical love are examined within the context of neoliberalism and the low status of public-school teachers, recurring themes in our discussions. The section is divided into two parts: the first delves into their experiences as English

teachers in Brazil, while the second examines how they enact pedagogical love and embody decolonial practices in their work.

Teaching English in a Public School in Brazil: A Toxic Relationship?

One of the central themes in our dialoguing was the low status of public-school teachers in Brazil. Both Vivi and Raquel highlighted how their profession is undervalued and how teachers have gradually lost their authority in Brazil – a concern that aligns with the discussions in Section 2 of this chapter (Fortes, 2018; Garcia et al, 2021; Genaro, 2024;). Vivi pointed out that disrespect toward teachers often comes not only from students but also from parents, many of whom fail to recognize the importance of teachers' work. This situation led Raquel to reflect deeply on her role, questioning whether she was trapped in a toxic relationship with the school system:

> **Raquel:** I keep thinking about it. Am I not in a toxic relationship with the public school, [everyone laughs], a relationship of passion rather than love with the profession? Isn't it a toxic relationship? We do a lot, we get paid the minimum, and we are treated as poor little people by society, heroine teachers... Saving people... [...] and we know that this structure feeds on these teachers like us, so as not to do much.

Although Raquel loves working in schools, she often feels the weight of being a public-school teacher in Brazil, where her efforts go undervalued. She questions whether the system relies on teachers acting as heroes to perpetuate a structure that exploits and devalues them. This toxic dynamic reveals itself in several ways. First, the blatant neglect by authorities drives many

newly graduated teachers to seek more prestigious opportunities, such as private institutions or online teaching, where they can earn better pay and enjoy more comfortable working conditions. Second, the low status of teachers in Brazilian society adds to the problem. Raquel and Vivi comment on how public-school teachers are often portrayed as less knowledgeable and lacking in English proficiency, further undermining their professional respect and morale:

> **Vivi**: and then there's that too, Raquel, those who are successful, who are taking a Ph.D., who are teaching at the university, who are invited to participate in something are the ones who are teaching at universities, CEFET, institutes, but those who chose to be in public schools, "poor thing, she's still in it!" They look like at us, like: "she´s still here".
> **Raquel:** Or worse. They think we are here because it is what was left. We are seen as inferior.
> **Vivi:** It seems that you don't know English either, that you know less English or cannot speak English.

In this exchange, Vivi and Raquel highlight the stark contrast between how public-school teachers are perceived compared to their counterparts who teach at universities, CEFET, or federal institutes[22] – professionals who often hold more prestige in Brazil. Public-school teachers, on the other hand, are frequently seen as inferior and lacking the necessary expertise to

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The Federal Center for Technological Education (CEFET) is a federal public educational institution in Brazil. After Law 11.892/2008, most CEFETs became Federal Institutes (IFs), which offer professional, technological, undergraduate, and graduate education.

teach effectively. This toxic environment adds to their frustration and the feeling that they must "beg" students to allow them to teach, further underscoring the lack of respect and authority they experience in their roles:

> **Vivi**: This issue of being in a toxic relationship, we insist on teaching, begging to teach and we don't receive any feedback from students.
> **Raquel**: They often talk about how they like me. There is a student who is very naughty, very charismatic and who likes me. She said: "teacher, you can't complain, we let you teach".
> **Vivi**: The time I spend on this is time that I could be teaching and then the class goes back to Portuguese.

Vivi and Raquel explain that teachers often feel unable to voice their frustrations because they are at the mercy of students "allowing" them to teach, leaving them both feeling as though they are begging to do their jobs. According to Vivi, this not only wastes valuable teaching time but also forces them to resort to using Portuguese in class to maintain discipline. To cope with this challenge, Raquel tries to address the issue head-on by being vulnerable with her students. She openly shares how much effort she puts into preparing their lessons, hoping to foster mutual respect, and understanding:

> **Raquel**: That's why I say that I'm begging to teach. I'm always begging. I had to teach a class last year that no one wanted to teach. I stopped the class, sat at the table and said: "I spent all Sunday preparing this here. I did it for you, even though I already knew (I said very sadly to them) you were not going to care. I have done this for you: it was not the

school that asked for it. I wanted to do this. I told them: I could have asked you to open the book to this page, but no, I'm here with you. And then you receive me like this! Everyone was silent and then for a week I got peace, at least peace. Then they are back to what it was before. There are days when it hurts, I forgive, but I talk to them like that. I know there are things I can't control. It's sad to admit it. You want students to have maturity, but there are issues that I really don't know, things that are theirs and fall outside the school context.

Raquel expresses deep frustration and sadness at having to "beg" to teach, sharing how she sometimes opens up to her students by explaining the effort and dedication she puts into her work – unlike some of her colleagues. While these honest conversations have a short-lived effect, they leave her wishing for a different reality. She acknowledges that there may be factors beyond the classroom, outside her control, influencing students' behavior and attitudes.

As suggested above, a consequence of this toxic situation is the emotional toll it takes on these teachers. Raquel shares how the constant devaluation leaves her feeling isolated and lonely. She wishes she could experience greater collaboration among colleagues. She longs for a different reality, one where teachers are respected by society and parents alike, and where their work is truly valued:

Raquel: I miss having a community at school, I miss parents looking at us in this sense of people who are trained and know what they are doing. We are not perfect, we make mistakes, but I find questioning from parents, from management, who

do not understand our area; and also from society. I don´t know if you feel the same way, but I felt it has gotten worse since 2018. Some parents may complain: “they are teaching this and that in the classroom”... so this is discouraging and very toxic! And whenever we complain someone says: why didn't you try this method? But sometimes it's not our methodology, it's other things that don't depend on us. If they continue with this thing that education is individual, it will be very bad, because it will always be individual – they will continue to blame teachers and nothing will be done about unjust and unequal structures. All of this makes me sad.

Vivi agrees and expressed the feeling of guilt society tries to attribute to teachers. She explains that “It seems that we are the problem, that it is our fault. But we are doing our part. This makes me sad, and the fact that you have to be careful in class with what you say and how you correct things”. Thus, in addition to the sadness, low status, and devaluation they endure, Vivi and Raquel now feel as though they are being blamed for the current situation. They describe feeling lonely, sad, and even persecuted, constantly having to watch what they say in class. Both express disappointment at the lack of support from parents and the school system. Raquel concludes by emphasizing the intense emotional labor that this situation demands – they feel isolated and burned out from carrying the weight of caring for everyone; yet, no one seems to care for them in return:

Raquel: I feel that we need to absorb everything, take care of everything but no one wants to take care of us. For us to care for students as we do, there is a lack of affection in the education secretariats, and in society at large. Unfortunately, I

feel that there has been an increase in a certain hatred and a more robotic view of the teachers.

Raquel highlights the emotional labor that teachers endure, constantly caring for everyone and everything without receiving reciprocity in return. She also expresses sadness about how teachers are portrayed in society, which ties into the deficit view of teachers in Brazil discussed earlier (Fontes, 2018; Garcia et al., 2021). Teachers are burned out from doing so much, receiving so little, and getting no recognition for their efforts. This overwhelming burden leaves them feeling unsupported and exhausted.

Pedagogical Love Enacted

While analyzing the transcripts of our dialoguing, two key insights emerged: (a) the shared understanding and enactment of pedagogical love in Vivi's and Raquel's practice, and (b) how their interpretation of pedagogical love aligns with the core characteristics of this concept.

As highlighted in the literature, critical pedagogical love involves both choice and action. Despite the challenging context of devaluation, struggles, lack of support and resources, and low status, as previously discussed, Vivi and Raquel deliberately chose to teach English in public schools. In their own unique ways, they embody and enact pedagogical love in their teaching practices. They genuinely love being in the classroom and working with students. Raquel describes herself as "the happiest person in class," while Vivi emphasizes the many positive aspects of teaching that bring her joy: "I love being in the classroom; I go with an open soul. It is a delight to be there. I arrive smiling, we sing, we learn by playing, we make jokes." Vivi's words reflect the

fulfillment she finds in teaching, even within this challenging context. This joy and commitment to public school teaching are deeply connected to their belief in critical pedagogical love, which they enact through practices such as fostering affectivity, *cariño*, and kindness; practicing attentive listening; and empowering students through the teaching of English.

Affectivity, Cariño and Kindness

Vivi and Raquel expressed love for being in schools and working with their students. This love is reflected in their actions, which are filled with care, *cariño*, and kindness. Raquel, for instance, describes herself as affectionate with her students, often hugging them because she believes they need this warmth and may not receive it at home. She explains, "I give affection and hugs because I see that this is necessary in that context! But that's not all." Echoing the findings of Olivia et al. (2024), Raquel emphasizes that respectful and ethical physical proximity is an integral part of a loving pedagogy[23]. Like the participants in Olivia et al.'s study, she acknowledges that offering hugs is an act of decolonial love in her context, as she understands the emotional needs of her students, many of whom come from broken homes and vulnerable contexts. Similarly, Vivi demonstrates *cariño* and affectivity through kindness and transparency with her students. She prioritizes dialogue when resolving conflicts, fostering an environment of trust and mutual respect:

[23] We are aware of cultural differences between students and teachers. Hugs are a common way of Brazilians to express affection to each other, not necessarily in a romantic way. In Brazil it is ok for teachers to hug their students (in a respectful, friendly and ethical way).

> **Vivi:** It's another thing for me to lie on the pillow and be at peace and know that I didn't say any rude words, that I was transparent in solving it there. When there is a student picking on something, or some confusion, I try to solve it right there, I ask for forgiveness, we solve it, we talk so as not to take it home, because we already have so many things: the planning, the tests to apply. You wake up heavy, you have a lot to do.

Being transparent involves being authentic and expressing their real emotions to students, as Raquel comments: being authentic means being real and stop faking emotions:

> **Raquel:** The best thing I did was stop pretending in the classroom. I think they get used to us always being great. A student who sleeps wakes up to the time of pronunciation. I love this student, but now I talk more about my emotions, about what I like or don´t like. I know them. I show them that I am not just on automatic. Many teachers behave in a detached way and think that this detachment is the right thing to do, but I'm not like that.

Raquel takes a different approach: rather than conforming to expectations of emotional detachment, she embraces her own vulnerability and emotions as a form of resistance. She believes in sharing her authentic self with her students, trusting them with her emotions rather than presenting herself as passionless or distant. For Raquel, this openness is integral to building genuine connections and getting to know her students on a deeper level. She acts in alignment with her true self, prioritizing

authenticity and attentive listening as essential components of her teaching practice.

Attentive listening

Vivi and Raquel frequently emphasized the importance of connection, not only with their students but also with colleagues and the broader school community. They believe that pedagogical love extends beyond the classroom, encompassing relationships throughout the entire school. Vivi links this sense of connection and collaboration to the practice of attentive listening. For her, attentive listening means being fully present, offering support, and fostering mutual understanding among everyone in the school environment:

> **Vivi**: Love is not only about students and teachers, but about the context as a whole. Sometimes we do not notice the details. Teachers need support [...] love permeates all of this, the cleaning staff, the kitchen; all of this makes us feel welcomed.

For Vivi, love manifests throughout the entire school community, including among colleagues, as they take time to truly listen to one another, noticing the small details, and showing care toward all members of the school staff. These actions make her feel welcomed and valued. As Albuquerque[24] noted, *ouvirtude,* a concept inspired by Freire, refers to the virtue

[24] Albuquerque, T. de S. (n.d.). *Paulo Freire in school: Teaching requires love, virtue, and constant evaluation of educational practice. Revista Construir Notícias*. See https://www.construirnoticias.com.br/paulo-freire-na-escola-ensinar-exige-amorosidade-ouvirtude-e-uma-constante-avaliacao-da-pratica-educativa/

of listening with the intention of caring and supporting others. Vivi emphasizes the importance of this practice and how essential it is within schools. Ana builds on this idea:

> **Ana**: This sense of welcoming is a characteristic of pedagogical love and I have seen how you, Vivi and Raquel, welcome people and listen to each other. Paulo Freire speaks of *ouvirtude*. What you do is *ouvirtude*. Pedagogical love is not only in the classroom. School can be a loving place.

This *ouvirtude* is also related to the transparency mentioned earlier by Vivi and the authenticity mentioned by Raquel:

> **Vivi:** This connection among teachers is fundamental!! I spoke with a teacher after the module. Teachers become friends. We spend more time at work than with friends, and we share personal things. So, I told her that she had said something that made me uncomfortable. Then I asked her: 'Would you say something like that about me?' I'm talking with love and respect. And she explained it to me, and it was really good to show transparency, to avoid creating discomfort. You build bonds, and those bonds are important. We do everything with so much care, love, and passion, it makes you feel truly happy. Last year, I stayed at school until 10 p.m. because it wasn't an environment that drained my energy. It gave me more energy; you know you have a team that will support you.

Vivi highlights some of the fundamental aspects of pedagogical love: connection, transparency, honesty, dialogue, respect, and the creation of meaningful bonds. She believes these

are achievable when one dedicates time to truly listen to others. As she points out, since we spend so much of our lives at work, it is essential to build strong relationships and feel supported by a cohesive team. In other words, collaboration is vital, though, as previously noted, it is often lacking in their contexts. Despite this, both teachers strive to foster collaboration by being caring and supportive colleagues. Raquel, too, emphasizes the importance of listening, not only to her students' stories, but also to her colleagues, particularly new interns who may need extra guidance and support. Like Vivi, she dedicates time to ensure others feel heard and valued, embodying the principles of pedagogical love in her interactions:

> **Raquel:** I had some time and I started to have contact with a support intern, she is new, and then we connected, understood each other; the management gave us the looks as she wanted me to realize that it was not time to talk; but teachers and interns have to talk; have a moment of *listening*, of getting to know each other.

Raquel emphasizes that, even when school coordination is not particularly supportive, she still takes the time to connect with new teachers. She believes it is essential for teachers to have the opportunity to get to know and listen to one another. This practice lies at the heart of pedagogical love, which, as discussed earlier, is rooted in connection, care, and mutual support (Barcelos, 2020, 2022).

Teaching English as a form of student empowerment

Vivi and Raquel's decolonial perspective on love also shapes their approach to teaching English, particularly within the Brazilian

context where public-school students are often viewed through a deficit lens, seen as unmotivated or incapable of learning English. For both teachers, playing a role in helping students "see" English with new eyes and fostering a genuine desire to learn the language is essential. As Raquel explains, this transformative vision is central to their teaching philosophy and practice:

> **Raquel**: We light this spark; they will start to like English. This is something that some students tell me: "I used to hate English before, but you took away my fear of English". Whether or not they have got the content, they have started to like English; So, it's a good thing I can see.

Raquel sees her role as igniting a spark, helping students develop a liking for English. She finds joy in witnessing students overcome their fear of the language and begin to enjoy it. This, to her, is an essential part of decolonial love: creating inclusion and empowerment through education. As Raquel explains, "It's important to explain why English matters; I think it's a way to empower them." For her, the decolonial aspect of teaching English lies in resistance, inclusion, and the pursuit of social justice. Vivi echoes this sentiment, noting that "English opens doors!" and adding, "Getting them to like it is already a big step!"

Both teachers firmly believe in the transformative power of English, particularly for students who lack exposure to English-language media such as films or music. For Raquel and Vivi, teaching English is not just about language instruction, it is about opening doors to new worlds and broadening students' horizons. They advocate for moving beyond the traditional, grammar-heavy approach that dominates many Brazilian public

schools, prioritizing instead the practical use of English in meaningful contexts. As Vivi notes, this shift is essential for making the language relevant, engaging, and accessible to their students:

> **Vivi**: I was astonished by the teacher saying that she was teaching first conditional. I prefer that they know how to answer "how are you! good afternoon!" I think the first thing is for them to be open. This connection between the teacher and the student will make them open to learn. Students will learn on their own because they are so interested.

Vivi was appalled when she heard a colleague focusing solely on teaching a specific grammar topic. She firmly believes that English should be taught for communication, emphasizing students' connection to the language, their autonomy, and their openness to learning. Both Raquel and Vivi recognize that helping students develop an appreciation for English, motivating them to study, and showing them how English can open doors is both a struggle and a significant accomplishment. Their approach goes beyond traditional methods, aiming to inspire students and demonstrate the transformative potential of language learning:

> **Vivi**: English opens doors. I think it is a start for them to study this on their own. These two classes a week, a few minutes is just an incentive for them to later develop on their own. This is very important. I have a student who is very interested. I have a 7th grade class all in English. I asked this student to go to the board and she spoke English very well. Making them like English is already a very good start!

They believe they can achieve this through pedagogical love, viewing their role as guiding students toward independence and self-discovery. Vivi illustrates this with an example of one of her students who now speaks English fluently, showcasing the impact of her approach. For Raquel, pedagogical love also means making a difference and working toward social justice. She sees teaching as an opportunity to empower students, challenge inequities, and create a more inclusive and just learning environment:

> **Raquel**: I think that is what makes me stay in public school. Despite the financial aspect, I do not intend to drop out of public school. I always want to be in public school, because that's where I feel like I'm making a difference. For me, it is social. It is no use me being right here earning my money with the world falling. I believe in people having access to good public education.

Raquel sees her role as helping students learn English and understand the importance of knowing a foreign language. She believes this is a powerful way to foster their sense of agency and confidence. For Raquel, access to quality, free public education is essential, as she firmly believes that everyone deserves the opportunity to learn and grow, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Discussion

As highlighted in the results, Raquel and Vivi face an uphill battle in gaining recognition for their work in a country where neoliberalism has deeply impacted public education. They grapple with systemic issues like teacher shortages, a pervasive

lack of respect for the profession, and even recent waves of persecution (Fortes, 2018; Genaro, 2021; Garcia et al, 2024). Both teachers are acutely aware of these challenges and openly discuss how they affect their teaching, emotions, motivation, and even their decision to stay in the profession. This struggle is not without its personal toll where moments of self-doubt and self-blame creep in. Above all, they feel isolated, lonely, and sometimes even guilty. Yet, despite it all, they resist and persist. As Raquel pointed out, simply choosing to teach English in public schools is itself a decolonial act. Staying in the system, despite its flaws, is an act of love, a radical commitment to their students and to the belief that education can be a force for change, echoing Holyoke's (2025) understanding of teaching as a conscious and restorative act of choosing love.

For Vivi and Raquel, teaching English goes far beyond language instruction; it is about empowerment and social justice. Through pedagogical love, they help students see the value of learning a foreign language, fostering independence, confidence, and a sense of possibility. Their approach prioritizes connection, practical use, and inclusivity over traditional grammar-focused methods. In doing so, they directly challenge the neoliberal deficit narratives that often surround public-school students. This resonates with Barcelos and Coelho's (2016) understanding of pedagogical love as a practice that affirms learners' identities, promotes agency, and creates emotionally meaningful language learning experiences. By choosing to teach in public schools, they reaffirm their belief in the power of free, quality education to transform lives and create a more equitable future. Their work is a testament to the decolonial act of centering love, care, and empowerment in teaching and learning.

However, their journey is not without its struggles. While Raquel and Vivi deeply love their students and are passionate about teaching, they face the harsh reality of a profession that offers little support or collaboration. They often feel isolated and undervalued, pouring their hearts into their work without receiving the recognition they deserve from schools or society. The low status of teachers, fueled by neoliberal ideologies that promote accountability, individual blame, and disregard for public education (Fortes, 2018), even spills into their classrooms, where they sometimes find themselves "begging" students to let them teach. One of the implications of this study is, as suggested elsewhere (Barcelos et al., 2022; Barcelos & Aragão, 2018; Barcelos & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018) teachers need emotional support and collaboration, especially in Brazilian society, which as discussed here, hold so little respect for teachers. In addition, we also need better pay, respect, and working conditions where teachers feel they can do their jobs well.

Despite these challenges, their commitment to pedagogical love – rooted in care, respect, *cariño*, vulnerability, and trust – remains a powerful counter-hegemonic force. It is a love that is not naïve but intentional, one that seeks to address inequalities and advance social justice.

Conclusion

This chapter delved into the stories and experiences of Vivi and Raquel, two public-school English teachers in Brazil, as they shared their struggles and approaches to teaching and enacting PL within a neoliberal educational context. Through their dialoguing with Ana, their former teacher educator, they reflected on the challenges of their profession and the ways they navigate, and sometimes question, whether their dedication is an

enactment of pedagogical love or a sign of being trapped in a toxic relationship with their work.

At the same time, while recognizing the toxicity of a system that often demands too much and offers too little in return, Vivi and Raquel embody pedagogical love in their practice. For them, pedagogical love is not just a teaching strategy; it is a form of decolonial pedagogy and positive psychology that helps them contest the dominant deficit narratives surrounding English teaching in Brazil. But why do they do it? It seems that pedagogical love serves as an act of resistance, a way to push back against the toxicity of neoliberalism and a remedy for the emotional exhaustion that can come with teaching. It becomes an antidote to becoming passionless in a system that often undermines their efforts.
So, how do they enact pedagogical love, and what does it look like in practice? For Vivi and Raquel, it is about creating inclusive, empowering environments in two key spaces:

1. In their classrooms, they respect and show kindness to their students, listen to them, and believe in their potential. They foster autonomy, authenticity, and transparency, discussing emotions and other meaningful topics. They empower students by going beyond the textbook, using English as a tool for communication and helping students find their voice – a radical act in a context where public-school students are often underestimated.
2. In their schools, they extend this love by being attentive listeners to colleagues and staff (employing *ouvirtude*), collaborating, and supporting one another. They show up with joy and presence, speak out against injustices, and work to create a culture of care and solidarity.

However, enacting pedagogical love is not without its risks. As Barcelos (2025) points out, it can lead to emotional labor, leaving teachers exhausted from giving so much while receiving so little in return. Yet, despite these challenges, Vivi and Raquel's stories highlight the transformative power of pedagogical love. Through small but profound acts, whether it is showing affection, offering *cariño*, listening deeply, or practicing ethical care, they create spaces where connection, respect, and empowerment can flourish. Their ability to build genuine relationships and foster collaboration, even in a system that fails to support them, is nothing short of remarkable.

By embracing vulnerability, staying true to themselves, and engaging in open dialogue, Vivi and Raquel do not just survive in a toxic environment, they actively resist it. Their work models a decolonial, love-centered approach to teaching that reminds us that pedagogical love is more than a variable or approach; it is a radical, holistic practice capable of transforming schools into spaces of care, solidarity, and hope. Their journeys inspire us to reimagine education as a site of love, resistance, and possibility, even in the face of challenging contexts such as the one described here.

Declaration

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGTP[OpenAI] solely as a support tool to assist with organizing the references according to APA 7th edition format and helping with language editing and proofreading to improve clarity and readability. After using this tool, the authors carefully reviewed and edited all generated content and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the publication.

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CHAPTER 9

From Challenges to Opportunities: A Turn from Deficit Discourse on Disabilities to Discourse of Lovingness and Diversity in ELT Education

Andrea Lizasoain

Abstract

This chapter is a reflection on the challenges and opportunities that I have faced as a hard-of-hearing teacher educator in English Language Teaching programs in Chile. The challenges refer to 1) having a hearing disability where oral reception is fundamental to fostering interaction and 2) teaching in a context where teacher inclusion and well-being have not yet been fully embraced. The opportunities involve 1) recognizing myself as a hard-of-hearing teacher and 2) taking steps to foster empathy, compassion and resilience in the classroom. In the form of a reflective practice case study, I ponder on how these challenges and opportunities have impacted my pedagogical practice. I underscore the need for a turn from a 'deficit' discourse to a discourse of 'lovingness,' which—enrooted in critical pedagogy—promotes the transformative power

of love and care as central to contemporary education through positive psychology.

Keywords: disability, English Language Teaching, critical pedagogy, lovingness

Introduction

Secondary education is usually associated with a critical period of learning and personal transformation for students, serving not only as a space for acquiring academic knowledge but also as a pivotal stage in the development of identity, values, and social awareness (Véliz & Farías, 2024). Teachers are expected to be agents of this transformation, including the implementation of new inclusion and mental-health policies and programs to serve students' diverse needs, sometimes without adequate training and to the detriment of teachers' well-being.

Added to this, having an impairment adds challenges to the possibilities of enacting transformation, which must be faced in contexts that are not prepared for inclusion. In my experience, students are often quick to assert their needs but unwilling to listen to or understand teachers' necessities. Consequently, I explore the challenges and opportunities that I have faced as a teacher educator with a hearing impairment working in English as a Foreign Language Teaching programs in Chile. I also describe a slow but steady transition from a deficit discourse to a lovingness discourse in education concerning teachers, based on Pierce's (2017) framework to conduct reflective practice case studies and Freire's ([2000]1993) critical pedagogy. Besides, I touch on some premises of positive psychology (Seligman, 2012), which may help future teachers understand the affective dimension of language learning and teaching, build supportive

classroom environments, and develop skills to foster resilience (Oladrostam et al., 2024). The aim of the chapter is to challenge power structures and social conventions that perpetuate standard forms of teaching and communication in English (and other subjects), which seem to preserve a colonialist (normative and prescriptive) view of teaching and learning the international language (Bonilla-Medina & Finardi, 2022; Canagarajah, 1999). The link between hearing impairment, deficit discourse, lovingness discourse, positive psychology, and colonialism may sound whimsical, but I will develop their pertinent relationship throughout the chapter.

Acknowledging Disabilities

My hearing impairment is congenital, but nobody realized it when I was a child, probably because I unconsciously developed strategies to learn Spanish, my mother tongue. I did not have clear communication problems at that time. I did not realize I had difficulty hearing some sounds until my late 20s. Doctors diagnosed congenital bilateral hearing loss after a few audiometry examinations taken systematically for about five years. It took me some time to acknowledge the impairment myself and embrace it. I do not remember when exactly I accepted my hearing loss but, looking back, I remember a few moments that should have caught my attention. Some moments relate to Spanish and others to English, which I learned as a foreign language from 7th grade onwards.

Regarding my experience with Spanish as a means of (mis)communication, I remember a boyfriend complaining about my tendency to avoid eye contact when he spoke to me. I eventually realized that I was not avoiding looking him in the eye but, instead, I was subconsciously lip reading to understand his

speech. A second moment is this image of me turning my left ear toward my right side to listen to people talking to me on my right, which is naturally an awkward head movement.

As far as English is concerned, my first memory is the difficulty of understanding song lyrics if I only listened to them. As an adolescent and young adult (80s and 90s), I became interested in British pop bands such as The Smiths, The Cure or Pulp. I could only understand a few words from the lyrics unless I read the booklet accompanying the cassettes and CDs of those times (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Photo of a song lyrics booklet accompanying a cassette* (sourced from https://i.redd.it/xp7anbpcnn871.jpg)



However, I did not know that I had an impairment yet; given the status of English in Chile and that people usually have a

rather limited understanding of the language, I felt that I was just one more Chilean with a bad ear for languages. A second moment is the phonetics lessons at university, when I pursued my undergraduate degree in English Studies. The listening exercises were a nightmare, and the minimal pair discrimination exercises were impossible. Words such as 'vote' and 'boat,' for example, were undistinguishable to me unless I read them and heard them simultaneously or if I could look at someone articulating them and I could see their lips moving.

Technically, hearing loss is categorized into four levels, based on severity. These points are measured in decibels hearing levels (dB HL), which indicate the softest sounds a person can hear (Olusanya et al., 2019). These levels help audiologists determine the best treatment or communication strategies to aid people with hearing impairment. First, mild hearing loss (26-40 dB HL) entails difficulties in hearing soft sounds and whispers as well as trouble understanding speech in noisy environments. Second, moderate hearing loss (41-55 dB HL) entails difficulty hearing normal conversation at a close distance, apart from being unable to hear soft sounds and whispers. Third, severe hearing loss (56-70 dB HL) makes it impossible for impaired individuals to hear normal conversation even at close range and they may only hear loud sounds (dog barking or vacuum cleaner). Fourth, profound hearing loss (71+ dB HL) means very little to no hearing ability. Thus, assistive devices for communication, such as hearing apparatus, cochlear implants or multimodal texts may help us depending on the context.

My type of hearing loss is moderate, which means I have trouble discriminating language in everyday conversations both in Spanish and English, especially in noisy environments such as the subway, pubs, social meetings and, dreadfully, in classrooms.

As a result, I would often ask people to repeat ideas, slow down speech, or speak more loudly. Even if university students are usually quiet, classroom acoustics is typically bad, which jeopardizes my understanding of their speech. I usually describe this situation as taking "an enormous cognitive effort to navigate interaction when you experience muffled hearing and you feel you are underwater" (Lizasoain, 2024, p.11). Another way I put it is by referring to Charlie Brown's teacher, whose speech is indecipherable for Charlie Brown (see Figure 2). This reality may cause misunderstanding and frustration.

Figure 2. *Charlie Brown's teacher's indecipherable speech*



(sourced from https://cdn.drawception.com/images/panels/2016/3-13/7g5NBjSKPC-4.png)

In my case, a hearing device helps, but it is not enough. I can only use one in the left ear, since the right ear only identifies noise; an apparatus in the right ear would only amplify noise instead of articulated language. The left ear makes up for the

right one, but only up to a certain point. Therefore, I now consciously resort to other communication strategies. For instance, I face people directly, ensuring I can see their faces and lips to assist oral language with lip-reading. I really wish people also produced captions when they speak! Also, I stand or sit strategically to hear people better with my good ear. I sometimes also warn people that I have a hearing loss (*hipoacusia* in Spanish) but they do not know what it is, so I rephrase it and say that I am deaf, and they laugh as they think I am joking.

Conceptual Framework of Disabilities

The first framework related to people with disabilities with a human rights approach is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, an international treaty signed by more than 180 countries (United Nations, 2006). Chile was one of the parties that adhered to it. The Convention's principal aim is to protect and foster the rights and dignity of people with disabilities by promoting full participation in society based on equal opportunities. It recognizes the right to live with independence and access to health care, education, employment, and well-being (*Servicio Nacional de Discapacidad* [SENADIS], 2023). The convention is grounded in a social model of disability, emphasizing the removal of barriers and deficit-based discourses, and promoting the development of an inclusive society—rather than focusing solely on the medical or health-related aspects of disability. In this line, Chile has committed to guaranteeing equality before the law, seeking to prohibit and eradicate discrimination against people with disabilities and to promote, protect and ensure full enjoyment of life, through the National Service of Disability (SENADIS, 2023).

This social model of disability is framed in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, which was first published in 2001 by the World Health Organization (WHO) (SENADIS, 2023). The document classifies health and health-related domains for measuring health and disability at individual and population levels (WHO, 2021). The principal aims of the Classification are to contribute with standardized language to refer to disabilities and to provide a common conceptual framework that allows comparison among countries and populations. The document categorizes the components of health and disabilities in terms of interacting physiological functions, anatomic structures, actions, tasks, and domains of life. Some components of health and disabilities are sight, hearing, mobility, learning, state of mind, and memory, in association with domains of life, such as transport, education and social interaction (SENADIS, 2023). This way, the Classification can describe the life conditions of people with or without disabilities. The components of health and domains of life intersect in social activities and participation related, for instance, to learning and knowledge application, communication, mobility, self-care, domestic life, and interpersonal relationships (WHO, 2018), all of which may be negatively impacted by a disability.

A disability is defined by SENADIS (2016) as "a symbolic construction, a generic and relational term that includes conditions of health, deficits, activity limitations and participation restrictions" (as cited in SENADIS, 2023, p.20). It is symbolic because the term 'disability' goes beyond its literal sense and carries more profound meaning than just the word dis-ability (an ability that impaired people lack). The focus of the definition is—thus—on the challenges that individuals may have when

interacting with their context. The latter is defined in terms of environmental and personal factors, including the physical world, other people, attitudes and values, social services and political structures (SENADIS, 2023). People with disabilities experience restrictions in active and full participation in social life and are, consequently, at a disadvantage.

These restrictions or disadvantages can be determined in terms of dependency and care. The more independence and capacity for self-care an individual has, the less impact the disability has on their life and others'. On the one hand, dependency is understood as the degree of physical and emotional assistance that a person with a disability needs from other people or technology to carry out an activity (SENADIS, 2023). For instance, people in wheelchairs may be more or less dependent if they can move with or without external help. I am generally entirely independent since I do not need other people's help unless I am in a noisy environment, such as restaurants or conference lobbies, where I sometimes require repetition or rephrasing by people who know about my disability. On the other hand, care involves activities to preserve, extend or fix our everyday world in order to live life in the best possible way (SENADIS, 2023). For example, my family is careful to speak to me when I am in the same room; they sometimes forget and shout from other rooms and I do not understand them. The best possible ways are still unavailable in most contexts, but positive psychology might help build them.

Since disabilities affect not only the people who have them but also the people around them—often family members, and women, in particular—having a disability is not an individual or personal problem, but a social one. In fact, SENADIS (2023) has identified more than three million people with disabilities in

Chile, corresponding to about 17% of the adult population. Out of this percentage, 18% are diagnosed with hearing loss (mild to severe). In fact, according to the World Report on Hearing (WHO, 2021), more than 1.5 billion people have some degree of hearing loss, accounting for about 18.5% of the world's population. Given these figures, it is striking that hearing loss is still considered an individual and 'invisible disability'. It is also remarkable that the universal symbol of a disability is still a person in a wheelchair, which does not represent disabilities unrelated to movement and mobility (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. *The universal symbol of disability*



(sourced from https://accessibleicon.org/img/icon-original.png)

Concerning inclusive practices at work, Chilean Law N.° 21.015 of Laboral Inclusion aims to promote the insertion of people with disabilities in public and private spaces. The Law

seeks to guarantee a minimum number of jobs for people with disabilities (1% in enterprises with more than 100 workers), to forbid discrimination, and to promote prevention and rehabilitation actions. Nonetheless, in the 20 years I have worked as a teacher, I have never been asked about my needs to perform in the same terms as my colleagues. Of course, no law can guarantee inclusion and appreciation of diversity. In fact, discrimination practices against teachers are pretty common in Chile and the world, who are subject to harsh criticism at schools and universities regularly (Anabalon Schaaf, 2022). This has a negative impact on overall teacher well-being, which may be translated into unpleasant emotions (Malaisi, 2023) —such as frustration, anxiety and discomfort—as well as job dissatisfaction (Yilorm & Guerra, 2024). Nevertheless, the promotion of positive psychology in educational contexts may contribute to developing teacher well-being.

Critical Pedagogy, Lovingness and Positive Psychology

Critical pedagogy is an approach to education that encourages educational communities to question and challenge discrimination practices, inequalities, and injustice in society (Freire, 2000[1993]). The key principles of critical pedagogy are the understanding of education as liberation, dialogical learning, actions against oppression, and student empowerment. The core idea is that education should not shape enslaved people but citizens who can understand the world and particular realities critically to transform them into more inclusive spaces (Véliz & Farías, 2024).

Although critical pedagogy focuses on students' empowered citizenship, since education is a social process, the principles identified above can also be applied and associated

with teachers (Canagarajah, 1999). In the framework of English Language Teaching, particularly, Birkner and Cortés Seitz (2024) describe critical pedagogy as "a language curriculum theory and instructional practice that promotes social justice through language teaching and learning" (p.178). Language is a means to talk about the world and English acquires special relevance as a global language for addressing and discussing global issues such as justice.

However, any curriculum or instructional practice can become prescriptivist and oppressive if educators are not prepared to promote social justice. In this regard, I sometimes feel that in the educational arena some people try to promote social justice from rage, discontent and rancor, all uncomfortable and unpleasant feelings. It is true, though, that "during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors" (Freire, 2000[1993], p.45) as a reaction against discrimination and the feeling of social injustice and lack of consideration. In this context, positive psychology may contribute to boosting more comfortable and pleasant feelings in the classroom, such as empathy and compassion (Oladrostam et al., 2024), which are only possible if we understand others.

To understand others, dialogue is a must. Education can be a source of liberation from imposed worldviews only through dialogical teaching and learning, in which teachers should foster meaningful discussions rather than promote a one-directional transfer of knowledge (Canagarajah, 1999), which still prevails in the Chilean school setting (Thibaut et al., 2025), strongly influenced by a prescriptivist standardized curriculum. Meaningful discussions to transform realities into more inclusive spaces demand the identification of sources of injustices like

sexism, racism, classism and any other forms of discrimination (Véliz & Farías, 2024), such as the one that impaired people experience every day when their needs are not understood, let alone met. To educate critical leaders of society and real agents of change, educational communities should focus on developing teacher and student agency and empowerment rather than social obedience or resentment. In English Language Teaching programs, particularly, critical pedagogy can promote an approach to the English language as a valuable means for global communication (rather than a personal asset) as well as inclusive practices that address diverse backgrounds and experiences (Birkner & Cortés Seitz, 2024; Véliz & Farías, 2024).

Foreign language classroom contexts present several cognitive, sociocultural and emotional challenges, among others (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021). First, learners experience a great cognitive load, since they must identify and produce new and unfamiliar words, as well as learn different grammatical rules to organize new vocabulary in appropriate language structures. Second, learners must struggle with interference from their first language, which adds to cognitive effort. Third, foreign language learners do not have enough exposure to the target language in real-life contexts, which makes developing fluency and automaticity complex. These challenges may lead to fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, and language anxiety, all of which place the learners of foreign languages in a vulnerable position. Listening is the basis of learning a foreign language, so you can imagine the challenge a person with hearing loss must face to develop this skill.

Raising awareness of the feeling of vulnerability is essential for 'mutual humanization' (Freire, 2000[1993], p.75]). In this regard, enrooted in critical pedagogy is the concept of

'lovingness', which refers to an ethics of care, respect and solidarity in the teacher-student relationship, contrary to colonial rationales such as domination, competition and dehumanization (Canagarajah, 1999). In this way, the practice of lovingness may be seen as a decolonial pedagogical strategy, whose aim is to build relational, reciprocal and communal ways of teaching, learning and knowing rather than to impose one way to teach, learn and know. Lovingness, therefore, may play a crucial role in the development of inclusion practices that embrace and value people with disabilities. According to Freire (2000[1993]), education should be an act of love, not in a sentimental sense, but as commitment to human dignity and comprehensive personal and social development. In this sense, lovingness can contribute to the inclusion of people with disabilities by understanding and embracing their everyday struggles with the environment, thus promoting compassion and empathy. In fact, positive affections, such engagement, meaningfulness, and accomplishment do contribute to positive classroom environments (Aron et al., 2017; Berger et al., 2009; Oladrostam et al., 2024).

In sum, critical pedagogy may serve the purpose of challenging traditional ways of teaching and learning, which focus on the transfer of knowledge and blind acceptance of Western colonial worldviews. These views traditionally highlight rational or intellectual aspects of humanity rather than, for instance, emotions, and privilege one hegemonic truth over diversity (Echeverría, 2012). Since critical perspectives of reality may raise unpleasant feelings such as rage, rancor or frustration, fostering lovingness may help build a loving dialogical space that allows for mutual understanding, compassion, empathy, and resilience. In this framework, positive psychology has been gaining interest in the educational setting, since fostering positive

emotions has proven to be effective in the promotion of safe spaces for teacher-student relationships. The reflection below supports these findings.

Methodology

Case studies can be used to identify individual or collective social problems or challenges based on empirical data (Creswell, 2009; Price, 2017; Simons, 2009). According to Price (2017), reflective practice case studies highlight personal experience and reflections about it based on the detailed description of the context and case. Their aim is to raise awareness of challenges that can lately be investigated through research case studies. From the health care field, Price (2017) states that "primary healthcare is a promising environment for exploring how experience and research evidence might be combined to review patient care" (p.35). Her statement can be paraphrased as 'education is a promising environment for exploring how experience and research evidence might be combined to review teacher care'. In the educational field, reflective practices have frequently been reported in the last decade, but they mainly relate to teaching effectiveness or professional development (e.g., Saavedra-Jeldres & Campos-Espinoza, 2020; Alvarado et al., 2019; Körkkö et al., 2019) rather than teacher well-being.

In this chapter, I reflect on my own case as a hard-of-hearing academic and teacher educator with a view to raising awareness of the importance of asserting teachers' and educators' needs. I also describe how I have begun to do it in my classroom, moving slowly but steadily from a deficit discourse (Toledo-Vega et al. 2022) to a discourse of lovingness and diversity in English Language Teaching Education in Chile. Following Price's (2017) procedure, I first described my case (acknowledging disabilities);

second, I outlined the support to discuss the case (above); and third, I highlight insights and issues related to diversity and ELT education (below).

From Challenges to Opportunities: A Turn from Deficit Discourse on Disabilities to Discourse of Lovingness and Diversity in ELT Education

When difficulties are addressed as opportunities, they become challenges and stop being handicaps. Besides, when we talk about traumas, they heal little by little. In this section, I refer to the two main challenges I have faced as a hard-of-hearing university teacher and the way I have turned them into opportunities to foster critical pedagogy, develop lovingness and boost positive emotions for myself and others in the classroom.

The first challenge I have faced as a teacher with a hearing impairment is embarrassment, an emotional state that causes self-consciousness and discomfort. These negative emotions affect my teaching performance because they keep me in a permanent state of alert, added to the cognitive load that speaking in a foreign language entails. On the one hand, I am afraid of not understanding students' ideas and, therefore, being unable to react accordingly. On the other hand, I am concerned about making mistakes as a product of this anxiety and frustration, which may be seen as communicative incompetence by students. In Chile, teaching English still responds to standardized models of the language and its teaching, which reinforce the idea of a 'legitimate English' language and accepted teaching methods, thus excluding diversity (Véliz & Farías, 2024) and individual needs. Prevailing native-speakerist ideologies continue to construct the 'ideal' English teacher as a nativelike, error-free speaker who eschews translanguaging and depends

exclusively on English. Also, students may think that teachers do not know English if they resort to their mother tongue. The EFL community does not take into consideration that—just as a person with a physical impairment might walk with a limp—an individual with a hearing impairment might stammer, stutter, or recur to multimodal resources, particularly in a challenging environment like a classroom. By bringing these kinds of challenges to the table, explaining to students what disabilities are, and making teachers' needs explicit through collective awareness, an environment of solidarity and lovingness can be built.

These special needs lead to the second challenge that hearing loss poses, concerning classroom interaction. Classroom interaction involves constant communication, active listening and immediate reaction to students' interventions. In a context where hearing loss limits sound perception, misunderstanding questions or answers are common, as exemplified above, which hinders fluid communication. Therefore, at the beginning of academic terms—still dealing with embarrassment—I talk about my moderate hearing impairment, including what it means. It means that I cannot perceive the same sounds as most of them can, which prevents me from participating in everyday interaction normally on some occasions. For example, I sometimes do not know where sounds come from or who is speaking. To make the problem clearer, I show them a video of Charlie Brown in class trying to understand his teacher to illustrate the challenge, as in Figure 2. Therefore, I explain to them that I need them to raise their hands when they speak so that I know where their voice comes from. I also need to approach them to support speech discrimination with lip-reading. And, most importantly, I need them to be patient,

because I might ask them to repeat ideas, speak slower or exaggerate articulation. I could really use captions! At the same time, I expose the cognitive load that dealing with a disability adds to an English as a foreign language classroom and its impact on spontaneous oral discourse. In turn, students look for other strategies to facilitate interaction, like speaking more loudly and slowly, echoing utterances, translating their ideas into Spanish or even writing them on the board. This way, I feel I am contributing to questioning the traditional way of teaching in the university context, where teachers are not supposed to show weakness and are expected to excel in all academic areas. Although the presence of frustration and criticism is undeniable, positive emotions like empathy, solidarity, compassion, and resilience are part of the course and teacher education.

I strongly believe that foreign language classrooms in Chile stand in a unique position to foster dialogue and understanding, because English as a foreign language learners know how vulnerability feels like (Lizasoain, 2024). At school, students must not only learn English in an adverse context because English is not spoken outside their classrooms, but they must also learn a language that they did not choose to learn. Learning English is a curricular imposition by the State, which has the conviction that English will bring citizen closer to academic and job success. However, teachers could be more explicit, reiterative and vehement in raising awareness that English does not belong to the colonizers anymore; quite on the contrary, speakers of English as an additional language have outnumbered native speakers. Consequently, English is a global international language that allows us to speak about global issues such as injustice and discrimination against vulnerable people, which are common to all human beings. In this sense, we must

discourage the association of English learning with academic and professional success to, instead, link it to comprehensive individual and social development. At university, student teachers have chosen to learn English, but they must also struggle with an adverse context, since exposition to the language is also reduced and many teacher trainees still think that English teachers must sound native. Therefore, the university context must be a setting where critical pedagogy is fostered.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, learners with hearing loss are at a disadvantage because language acquisition relies heavily on listening comprehension. Because listening is the foundation of language learning, auditory limitations increase the learner's vulnerability, which is already challenged by cognitive overload, first-language interference, and limited exposure to English. From a critical pedagogy perspective, however, this disadvantage should not be understood as an individual deficit but rather as a consequence of an educational system that has not been designed to recognize or respond to diversity (Freire, 2000[1993]; Véliz & Farías, 2024). The task, then, is to transform this disadvantage into an opportunity for social justice through inclusive practices, dialogical learning, and lovingness (Canagarajah, 1999), which reframe difference as a value rather than a shortcoming. Within this framework, positive psychology can support the affective dimension of critical pedagogy by cultivating empathy and compassion as conditions for authentic dialogue (Oladrostam et al., 2024). Thus, raising awareness of hearing loss extends critical pedagogy's call for education as an act of love, positioning EFL classrooms as sites where inclusivity and social justice are enacted through dialogical engagement and collective empowerment.

Conclusion

Being a university teacher with hearing loss has made me face several challenges, which I am turning into opportunities to rethink and redesign my teaching practices based on positive emotions such as understanding, empathy, solidarity and resilience. Through a reflective practice case study, I have described my path from a discourse of deficit that I had about myself to a discourse of lovingness that promotes equity and inclusion in teaching practices and stops the discussion on inclusion just for show. The final goal is to defy the unrealistic demands concerning university teachers' work, which overlook our realities and identities.

In this regard, although a student-centered approach is okay for building learning and addressing learners' needs comprehensively, I think it is also necessary to redefine a teacher-centered approach that addresses teachers' needs as well. Lack of institutional support reinforces the idea that teachers must adapt to rigid places instead of promoting inclusive and accessible systems beyond wheelchair access ramps. Apart from physical disabilities, teachers also suffer from invisible impairments such as hearing loss, autism spectrum disorder or attention deficit. This turn in discourse will not only benefit teachers with disabilities but will also contribute to building more just and humane academic communities.

Teacher trainers and teachers can foster lovingness and inclusion by redesigning classroom techniques, and getting used to including multimodal input (transcripts, captions, and other visual support) to address diverse classrooms. They can also encourage student voice by making space for diverse perspectives instead of only relying on teacher-centered explanations. Besides,

teacher trainers and teachers can normalize vulnerability by sharing stories of struggles (learning a foreign language, hearing loss) in order to humanize the classroom and encourage empathy.

Although my case is unique and I feel vulnerable and somewhat embarrassed to share it, I believe this reflective practice case study can shed light on broader challenges and concerns, raising awareness of the need to foster well-being.

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CHAPTER 10

Empathy in English Language Teaching at a Public HEI in Pakistan: A Strategy for Healing and Transformation in Postcolonial Global South

Kishwer Nazli, Nida Aftab, & Sajida Zaki

Abstract

Empathy in postcolonial ESL contexts is significant owing to the historical and cultural realities that impact learners, teachers, and the larger educational, work and social environments. Empathetic teachers demonstrate better with a holistic perspective. The chapter reports an empirical study undertaken to investigate the perceptions and practices of language teachers and teacher educators about empathy, empathetic teaching and learning, and teacher preparation in a postcolonial context. This qualitative case study collected data using two focus group interviews with teachers and two one-on-one interviews with senior teacher educators at a mainstream public university in Pakistan, with a large pool of teachers in charge of compulsory English language courses across four campuses and about fifty undergraduate programs, and with a prominent English language

teacher education department providing TESOL and Applied Linguistics education and training. The findings reveal that empathy goes beyond teachers' strategies to offer emotional support and reduce learners' anxiety.

Keywords: Empathy in ELT, Postcolonial Education, Public Higher Education in Pakistan

Introduction

English language teaching and learning remains a high-stakes undertaking in postcolonial Pakistan. It's a complex issue shaped by the country's status as a multilingual, second language, and third-world context, which creates several challenges. These complexities are further compounded by shifting ideological and epistemic positions, leading to social inequities. English is the official language and a primary medium of instruction in Pakistan, making it a required subject from elementary school through university. This institutional emphasis on language ensures that it is a fundamental part of the academic journey for students across the country. However, English language teaching and language teacher preparation have remained under criticism in public discourse and academic literature for being rooted in the colonial legacy and disconnected from the current developments in disciplinary knowledge and professional practice (Thuy & Thao, 2025). With the rapid expansion of higher education in Pakistan from the 2000s onwards and the rise of the English language as the global medium of communication, English language teaching and teacher preparation reforms at the national, state, and institutional levels became a critical focus of attention. Several higher education institutes-initiated programs to produce teachers capable of delivering compulsory and elective

courses (English language proficiency, oral communication, academic writing, business English) to a large undergraduate student population. With mounting pressure from the accreditation, regulatory, professional, and governing bodies of the universities to enhance the educational outcomes and graduating competencies, including language and communication skills, universities are forced to revisit teacher quality. The educational outcomes and standards, including English language teaching-learning, are directly mediated by the qualifications and skills of the teachers. These teacher preparation programs claim to equip teachers with the latest theoretical and methodological developments, enabling them to adopt the most appropriate pedagogy and instructional strategies, including teaching with empathy, for a complete transformation of teaching approaches. Empathy in second language teaching-learning is both a reality and an ideal for the social higher education contexts of Pakistan. The incorporation of empathy into English Language Teaching (ELT) has in the recent past received a lot of attention due to the improvement in the learning experiences of individuals, especially in multilingual and multicultural environments (Guan et al., 2024).

This is especially evident in the postcolonial context of Pakistan where language teaching is intrinsically linked to power dynamics, history, culture, and language differences (Porto & Zembylas, 2020). Also, in the Global South, where colonial legacies have shaped language policies and teacher preparation programs, integrating empathy into pedagogy can serve as a transformative strategy for both educators and learners (Canagarajah, 2005; Pennycook, 2021). In the 21st century, education, second language acquisition, TESOL, applied linguistics, and psychology have brought a major paradigm shift.

The focus has moved from a structuralist to a post-structuralist lens, expanding language teaching and learning beyond just grammar and vocabulary to include broader social, psychological, and emotional domains.

As a result, teaching is now viewed as both a cognitive and affective process. Pedagogy has shifted from being teacher-centric to learner-centric, and emotional intelligence is now recognized as central to effective instruction and professional teacher preparation.

Empathy is ideal for decolonizing English language education programs, curriculum, pedagogy, and instructional materials. It helps address complex issues stemming from the multilingual social context and the need to promote learner agency. This approach is crucial for preparing a workforce that can guide the country toward socio-economic progress (Karimian, 2022). Against this backdrop, the current literature on empathy brings numerous benefits for second-language teaching-learning and second-language teacher preparation. Empathetic teaching lowers the affective filters, reducing learner anxiety and stress, increases motivation by improving learner engagement and ownership of the learning process, and improves classroom culture fostering teacher-student trust and cooperation, and peer-support and collaboration which eventually facilitates language acquisition and achievement and learner autonomy (Ze et al., 2014). Teachers trained for empathetic teaching demonstrate better cultural sensitivity as empathy enables them to accept linguistic diversity and practice inclusivity, build a better teacher-student relationship based on trust, respect and positive rapport, and plan pedagogy and classroom management more critically by recognizing students' emotional and behavioral needs. These positive implications of

empathy contribute to teaching and teacher success criteria that are increasingly measured qualitatively and quantitatively by different stakeholders for varied purposes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

This chapter presents a qualitative study that explores empathy in English language teaching and teachers' preparation, with a focus on investigating perceptions and practices related to empathy for the potential for healing and transformation at a university in post-colonial Pakistan. This can apply to similar other contexts in the Global South. The challenges of a postcolonial context highlighted in the preceding sections are addressed through empathy by employing interpretivism, poststructuralism, and positive psychology as the theoretical and research perspectives. This case study draws insights from two key datasets. First, qualitative focus-group interviews with language teachers to investigate their perspectives, practices, and experiences about the scope of empathy in second language teaching, and ways they practice empathetic teaching; and second, one-on-one interviews with teacher educators to understand institutional approaches, training mechanisms, and policy considerations for embedding empathy in teacher preparation programs. The thematic analysis of responses from both groups provided a structured understanding of how empathy functions as a transformative element in language teaching within a post-colonial academic setting. After introducing the focus of the study and situating it within the context and domain of Pakistan, the chapter connects with the foundational literature, leading, then, to the findings and discussion.

Conceptual and Theoretical Understanding of Empathy

Historically, empathy was seen as an emotional response linked to moral development and social bonding (Hoffman, 2014). Modern definitions include both emotional and cognitive aspects, such as perspective-taking and emotional intelligence. Ratka (2018) describes empathy as both an innate trait and a skill that can be developed. Neuroscience links empathy to the mirror neuron system, which aids social learning. Empathy in education consists of key cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. Cognitive empathy involves understanding students' emotions and challenges, allowing teachers to recognize their needs and provide appropriate support. Affective empathy refers to sharing and resonating with students' feelings, which helps build trust and strengthen teacher-student relationships. Behavioral empathy is demonstrated through compassionate actions, such as adapting teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles and emotional needs (Wink et al., 2021). These elements collectively enhance student engagement, motivation, and overall learning outcomes. Research indicates that empathetic teaching fosters a positive classroom environment, reducing student anxiety and increasing participation (Aldrup et al. 2022). Additionally, empathy-based approaches contribute to culturally responsive teaching, ensuring inclusivity in diverse educational settings (Roy, 2022).

Empathy in Language Teaching

Empathy is one of the foundational attitudes desired in second language teaching and learning processes as it promotes positive affective relations, reduces learners' stress, as well as increases cultural awareness, which are crucial for managing specific difficulties in multilingual and diverse classrooms (Floyd &

Castek, 2020). Aldrup et al. (2022) further elaborate that empathy involves both emotional atonement and cognitive understanding of students' perspectives, encompassing their emotional and reasoning dimensions. Empathy enables effective interpersonal communication, generates trust, and assures everyone that they are welcome members of a learning culture. It extends beyond cognitive approaches to teaching by incorporating affective domains critical to second language acquisition (Guan et al., 2024).

The ability of a teacher to understand and regulate emotions is empathy, an attribute of emotional intelligence. The emotional aspect of self and others allows instructors to foster positivist teacher-student relationships and enhance instruction delivery based on students' learning needs (Porto & Zembylas, 2020). Some of the findings by Anwar et al. (2021) propose that emotional intelligence improves teacher effectiveness in fostering better outcomes for learners, especially those in multilingual and multicultural settings. Understanding situational realities, as is the case of the Pakistani context in this chapter, is essential for teachers in multilingual and multicultural classrooms. ELT, in this regard, is responsive to several socio-cultural and linguistic factors. Students bring multicultural linguistic and ethnic backgrounds with them and, as a result, they may feel excluded or stressed when learning English as the language of privilege (Aldrup et al., 2022). Empathy assists a teacher in overcoming these challenges by adopting a culturally appropriate learning model that embraces language differences among the learners. It fosters purpose in students to be accountable in the learning process, promoting their active participation.

Compassionate teaching practices are not unique to Pakistan but have been discussed in other countries, which can

provide helpful cross-systems comparison. Gkonou et al. (2020) stress the affectionate or emotional aspects of language teaching in the Western context. Their work shows how classroom dynamics are affected by empathy: anxiety is lowered, and learner motivation is increased. Thus, the implications of these findings pertain directly to studying the potential of empathy in reshaping language learning as a holistic form of learning that meets cognitive and affective concerns. When applied in other Eastern societies, research on empathetic modes of teaching and learning further shows that the approaches may help enhance cultural regard and facilitate respect amongst learners. According to Mercer (2016), empathy is a valuable tool for predicting the positive effects on learners' psychological processes in SLA-related tasks. Providing empathetic instructions will help students learn a second language and become happier. Such outlooks stress empathy as implemented worldwide in the education processes but being sensitive to the contextual differences in its application, including the postcolonial ones.

Postcolonial English Language Teaching-Learning

In a postcolonial environment like Pakistan, the teaching and learning of English cannot be fully understood without considering colonial and historical circumstances. During colonial rule, English was brought in as an official language and a medium of administration, legitimizing the status of an elite group of people who could speak English and discriminating the rest who could not (Tagata, 2022). This reality remains the case today as English is still a defining attribute of social status, and it is mandatory to possess good English for academic and career enhancement. The existing status quo privileges individuals with

an English education, thereby marginalizing those without similar access.

Empathy as a Strategy for Decolonizing Second Language Teaching & Teacher Preparation

The colonial history of the English language carries forward tensions in postcolonial English language teaching and learning contexts. Empathy can be incorporated as a strategy that can aid in the decolonization of English pedagogy and in revisiting the non-native and second language learners' identity and ownership challenges. Chandio et al. (2023) critical exploration of ELF theory highlights the need to shift away from native-speaker norms—an effort that parallels decolonial goals in language education and opens avenues for fostering empathy by validating students' multilingual identities and experiences. Nominee et al. (2020) added that it allows teachers to build learning climates that are diverse and inclusive of students' language and cultural backgrounds. Guided empathy fosters acceptance by welcoming the dismissal of biases by teachers and students alike and encourages even non-English speaking individuals who sometimes feel incompetent. For instance, using students' mother language or references to culture in their learning can encourage the reception of information. Zhang (2022) added that another essential part of decolonizing pedagogy is reducing the effects of systems of social injustice. Embracing equity and justice in context enables teachers to identify and address the struggles of marginalized learners. This is the case in Pakistan, where social and economic classes mean that there is compartmentalization of language differences, making it hard for children to have equal opportunities to get an education and succeed at the same time.

As stated by Aldrup et al. (2022), the philosophical understanding of empathy in learning is grounded on a post-structuralist framework, which does not see the teaching-learning process as a fixed phenomenon but as a contextual paradigm. Post-structuralism derides traditional structuralist views on education as too rigid and authoritarian (Aldrup et al., 2022). At the same time, learning support is centered on the initiatives of learners and the development of affective and interpersonal domains. Therefore, the incorporation of positive psychology into SLA focuses on empathy in motivating, strengthening, and promoting general well-being. Empathetic pedagogy can respond to both the need for knowledge and patterns of thinking and affective processes by involving cognitive and affective aspects in language learning.

Zhai and Wibowo (2022) highlighted that it is equally clear that empathy holds rich implications for the teaching and learning of second languages. Empathy helps remove learners' anxiety and stress that often hinders learning a new language. This way, teachers can reduce students' affective filters so that they can engage in more effective learning. Karimian (2022) also noted that empathy is suitable for learner motivation since the students will appreciate and feel the teacher understands them better and, thus, put in more effort. In addition, empathetic teaching enhances learner autonomy as students are spurred to be responsible for their learning. When teachers demonstrate genuine concern for their students and are willing to listen to and value their concerns, students are more likely to take a chance. This is especially true in ELT, where confidence and communication are essential to achieving specific learning goals.

Additionally, Malik & Urooj (2012) explore the challenges and systemic issues facing teacher education in Pakistan,

identifying key problems including outdated curricula and lack of professionalism. They argue for a comprehensive overhaul of teacher education programs to align with practical classroom realities and foster research-driven innovations to enhance the quality of teacher education. English language courses are still conducted using conventional methods that remain ineffective and whenever qualified tutors' experiment with a modern pedagogy that engages students, classrooms are transformed and language learning happens (Sultana and Zaki, 2015). In addition, a major challenge in Pakistan is unavailability of English language teachers (ELTs) with adequate training that help them address the contextual needs of ESL classrooms and learners. Although there is an exponential upsurge in teacher training programs organized by both public and private organizations, these initiatives remain inadequate in a structured and regulatory framework, curtailing teacher efficiency and learners' progression (Tahira et. al, 2020). Aligned with this challenge, another critical barrier is the in-depth influence of the classic British literature degree as teacher training programs are ruled by historical legacy rather than specialized TESOL and Applied Linguistics, not to mention their limited access and high cost. Consequently, teachers are mostly ill-equipped to understand the needs and diversity of learners in various contexts. The persistent issue may be resolved by extensive training in language pedagogy, improved curriculum, and by reinforcing the significance of teachers' emotional intelligence. As Anwar et al. (2021) observe, teachers with the attributes of empathy and emotional intelligence perform better and succeed in creating a symbiotic bond with their learners, producing confident, empathetic and emotionally stable learners who undoubtedly will be impacting society positively.

Methodology

The study involved interpreting the concept of empathy in language teaching/learning and teacher preparation. Empathy is assessed by observable and measurable behaviors rather than abstract inner feelings. This approach functionalizes empathy as tangible actions that can be identified and analyzed within the data. For this purpose, qualitative research was conducted to collect data from language teachers and teacher educators at a mainstream public university. The selection of the research site was based on two important factors. First, its academic and graduate reputation and large student population across fifty-plus undergraduate professional programs implying the presence of a qualified and large pool of language teachers involved in teaching compulsory English language courses. Second, its language teacher preparation department has been the main provider of ELTs for universities and colleges within the region for over a decade, with master's and doctoral programs in TESOL and Applied Linguistics. The study participants included ten English language teachers and two teacher educators. The two-tiered approach allows for a rigorous understanding by capturing insights from both teachers and teacher educators. The teachers selected had at least two-years of experience teaching compulsory English courses in different undergraduate programs and possess at least a master's degree in TESOL or Applied Linguistics. In addition, participants were selected based on their seniority and role in the postgraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the study participants.

The data from the teachers were gathered using two focused group interviews and one-on-one interviews with the two

teacher educators. Institutional and individual informed consents, permission to record the discussions, anonymity, and confidentiality ethics were followed. Participants were invited through email to participate in the study. They were provided study details, ethics statements, and chose to volunteer for the study by signing informed consent. Subsequently, 10 teachers and 2 teacher educators agreed to participate in the study. The questions constructed for the study were aimed to explore:

Q.1: How empathy in language teaching was perceived and practiced by ELTs?
Q.2: How are teachers prepared for teaching with empathy in teacher education programs?

Table 1. *Demographic Profile of Participants (T is Teacher, TE is Teacher Educator)*

Participant	Gender	Age	Education	Experience	Academic Position
T1	F	31-35 years	Masters	2-10 Years	Lecturer
T2	F	31-35 years	Masters	10-20 Years	Lecturer
T3	F	41-45 years	Masters	10-20 Years	Lecturer
T4	F	41-45 years	Masters	10-20 Years	Lecturer
T5	F	41-45 years	Ph.D.	10-20 Years	Assistant Professor
T6	F	25-30 years	Masters	2-10 Years	Lecturer
T7	F	36-40 years	Masters	2-10 Years	Lecturer

T8	F	36-40 years	Masters	10-20 Years	Assistant Professor
T9	F	25-30 years	Masters	2-10 Years	Lecturer
T10	F	25-30 years	Masters	2-10 Years	Lecturer
TE1	F	41-45 years	Ph.D.	10-20 Years	Assistant Professor
TE2	M	41-45 years	Ph.D.	10-20 Years	Assistant Professor

Data Analysis

Krueger and Casey's (2000) framework for qualitative data analysis was employed to analyze recorded interviews. The process involved multiple stages including data familiarization, categorization and coding, theme identification, verification, and interpretation for both tiers of the interviews (See Table 2).

Table 2*: Analysis of Focus Group Interviews based on Krueger and Casey's Framework*

Step	Description	Application
Data Familiarization	Reviewing transcripts, noting initial impressions, and summarizing key ideas	The focus group discussions were transcribed and reviewed multiple times to capture teachers' and teacher educators' perspectives on empathy in language teaching.
Categorization and Coding	Identifying repeated words,	Key phrases such as compassion burnout,

	phrases and ideas to create an initial coding scheme	teacher reflexivity, empathy vs. kindness, motivation, and self-confidence were coded.
Theme Identification	Grouping similar codes into broader themes based on theoretical and emerging patterns.	Pre-determined themes and emerging themes were identified.
Verification and Refinement	Cross-checking themes for consistency, removing redundancies, and validating findings.	The themes were filtered through revisiting participants' responses.
Interpretation and conclusion	Relating themes to the research framework and drawing meaningful conclusions.	The findings were analyzed in light of SEL, Transformative Learning and post-colonial English language teaching and learning.

Data collection for this study was based on an exploratory qualitative research design. Creswell and Path (2016) stated that qualitative inquiry is well-suited if the phenomenon being studied can be defined by the experience of humans. For this study, we carefully transcribed and reviewed the recordings to capture the perspectives of English language teachers and teachers' educators. Through iterative coding, key phrases and patterns were grouped into broader thematic categories. Both

pre-determined themes and emerging themes were examined to provide a comprehensive analysis. The verification stage involved refining these themes through peer review and cross-checking with participants' insights to ensure credibility. Finally, the themes that emerged were not only examined in relation to Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Transformative Learning Theory, and Critical Pedagogy but were also examined through a post-colonial lens, especially regarding the legacy of colonial education systems in the Global South. This analysis highlights how empathy can be utilized as a significant transformative force in challenging traditional, stereotypical, and static educational systems that have historically enforced Western and colonized education systems. The findings are presented below thematically with discussion in the subsequent section.

Findings

The findings provide comprehensive insights into the main and sub-themes that contribute to the ongoing discourse on empathy in language teaching. To illustrate this, Table 3 synthesizes key explorations of integrating empathy into English language teaching (ELT) practices, highlighting the importance of understanding students' diverse struggles and addressing the challenges they face. The themes range from recognizing the impact of colonial linguistic imperialism to employing practical strategies that foster empathetic classroom environments. By categorizing these themes and sub-themes, we aim to provide educators with a clear framework for developing more empathetic approaches in their teaching methods, ultimately enhancing students' learning experiences.

Table 3: Main themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Empathy in Language Teaching	Understanding students' struggles
	Addressing linguistic and socio-economic barriers
	Healing from colonial linguistic imperialism
	Practical empathetic strategies
	Challenges in practicing empathy
Empathetic English Language Practices	Active listening and non-verbal communication
	Classroom flexibility and adapted teaching methods
	Encouraging participation through classroom norms
	Teacher reflexivity
	Teacher training limitations
Developing Awareness and Skills about Empathy	Incorporating empathy in ELT training
	Mentorship and reflective practices
	Moving beyond colonial-era ideologies
Transforming English Language & English Language Teaching Ideologies	Validating linguistic identities
	Healing from linguistic imperialism
	Institutional and policy reforms

Empathy in Language Teaching

Since empathy might appear as an elusive construct, it is important to understand the interpretation of empathy by the ELTs who participated in interviews. As shown in Table 3, most of the participants interpreted empathy as the ability to understand students' struggles and provide a supportive learning environment. One of the participants explained, "for me is being attentive to someone, paying attention to everything they are communicating verbally and non-verbally, and catering to their needs if they require any assistance (Teacher 1). Another participant emphasized its role in effective teaching, stating, "Empathy is about understanding what students are going through and giving them the support they need without making them feel like they are receiving favors" (Teacher 3).

In the Pakistani context, where English is taught as a second language and connotes prestige and status, empathy was considered a crucial tool for addressing linguistic and socio-economic barriers in education. One participant highlighted, "English education does not come easily to everyone in Pakistan. It requires effort, money, and access, which many students struggle with. As a teacher from a middle-class background, I relate to their struggles and try to support them through inclusive classroom practices" (Teacher 2).

Another participant noted, "if a teacher is empathetic, students feel safe, their anxiety reduces, and they are more open to sharing their difficulties" (Teacher 4), and added " One validated point in the Pakistani context is that teachers should set realistic, achievable goals for learners, rather than lofty, unattainable ones often influenced by native-speaker models of English, such as perfect pronunciation and grammar". The majority of the participants agreed that in Pakistan,

understanding and implementing empathy with its true essence can alleviate the frustration and anxiety of learners who are struggling with a loss of identity in English language class, and that empathetic teaching can improve inclusivity among learners from diverse backgrounds and achievement levels.

Extending the role of empathy in teaching English effectively was also considered as a healing agent that helps students overcome the deep-seated psychological scars of colonial rule and linguistic imperialism. A participant emphasized, "many students have internalized the belief that their English is inferior and feel alienated when they are asked to speak and present in English. They fear making mistakes and feel ashamed of their accents. In this situation, an empathetic teacher helps them remove this colonial burden and reclaim confidence in their voice by adapting teaching methodologies and by setting doable goals" (Teacher 10).

Another participant reflected on the broader impact of colonial linguistic dominance, stating, "Pakistani students often feel disconnected from English because it is seen as a foreign language imposed upon them. An empathetic teacher makes it more relatable and accessible, reducing the sense of alienation (Teacher 7).

Participants contributed to the discussion with their classroom experiences by sharing practical empathy-based strategies, such as, motivational language, positive feedback, creating safe space and celebrating small wins that proved helpful in the situations where they most needed to reduce stress. One teacher explained, "a group of students once told me, 'We can't speak English, and we are afraid of making mistakes.' Instead of reinforcing their fear, I created personalized learning materials, allowed them to practice privately, and slowly built their

confidence" (Teacher 6). Another participant highlighted the importance of non-judgmental support, stating, "We, as non-native English teachers, face certain pressures because we teach a language we did not learn as children. We need to be shown empathy too" (Teacher 5). They also pointed out that empathy is so refined that this trait cannot be expected from students and should be incorporated imperceptibly rather than explicitly.

Despite its overarching benefits, participants acknowledged the challenges of practicing empathy, including institutional constraints, the pressure of teaching correct pronunciation, teacher burnout, and insufficient teacher training programs. The standards set by senior teachers and institutions also pose a challenging situation for ELTs. One participant observed, "You can't remain empathetic all the time. There are occasions when you have to assert yourself to meet course objectives" (Teacher 4). Another participant pointed out the risk of over-empathizing, stating, "Teachers sometimes misunderstand empathy as kindness and struggle with excessive empathy, which can be exhausting" (Teacher Educator 1). They also mentioned that there should be remarkable differences between sympathy and empathy, which should be clarified for all parties involved. Conclusively, the challenges teachers face in incorporating empathy into English teaching stem from a combination of factors, including a lack of specific training, but also broader issues like curriculum constraints, limited resources, and teacher burnout.

Empathetic English Language Practices

The participants offered a plethora of perspectives on what makes a teacher empathetic. They all agreed that empathetic teaching practices foster a supportive and engaging language

learning environment. They disclosed various actions they implemented in their teaching, drawing upon their real classroom situations and experiences. One participant emphasized the role of active listening, stating, "We teachers are already active listeners. We pay attention to what our students communicate, both verbally and non-verbally, and respond to their needs" (Teacher 8). Another participant highlighted the importance of non-verbal communication, explaining that we use positive body language and gestures that make students feel heard and supported, which helps build their confidence in using English" (Teacher 9). Also, they stressed the importance of setting up the rules in the classrooms that could make everyone comfortable and fearless while presenting their speeches.

Empathy was also reflected in classroom flexibility and the adaptation of teaching methods to meet diverse student needs. One teacher shared, "If my students need additional examples or different ways to understand a concept, I adjust my lesson plan. Recently, when my stylistics students struggled with phonological foregrounding, I made them watch *"Pygmalion: 'My Fair Lady'* to see real-life applications" (Teacher 3). Another participant recalled, "A group of Pathan[1] students in my class struggled with English and feared being mocked for their accent. I created slides with subtitles and allowed them to practice privately before presenting them in front of the class. This helped them gain confidence" (Teacher 1).

In addition, empathetic classroom norms encouraged participation and reduced anxiety. One teacher explained, "We set classroom rules at the beginning: no one laughs at anyone, and everyone gets a chance to speak. This allows students to participate without fear" (Teacher 6). Another participant highlighted the significance of teacher reflexivity, noting that

"Being empathetic helps you become reflexive. It makes you recall your struggles as a learner and adjust your teaching accordingly" (Teacher 10).

Developing Awareness and Skills about Empathy and Empathetic Teaching

There was a constant press on specifically designed Teachers' Development programs that could cater to diverse needs and situations. It was emphasized by teachers and teacher educators that traditional teacher preparation and training programs do not prepare teachers for empathetic teaching, especially in a second language context. Particularly, teacher educators stated, "Teachers' training programs most of the time do not really sit well with you because they follow a one-size-fits-all approach. They don't allow teachers to reflect on their journey as students or educators" (Teacher Educator 1). The other teacher educator stressed the importance of self-awareness, stating, "Teachers should be made to realize that they are important and have a significant role to play in the classroom. Once they gain this confidence and awareness, they can incorporate empathetic practices" (Teacher Educator 2).

The teacher educators also highlighted the importance of incorporating empathy in ELT and developing training programs that incorporate soft skills in the curriculum. One teacher educator stated, "Training programs should focus on inclusivity, equity, and emotional intelligence. Incorporating empathy into ELT is crucial for creating a supportive, inclusive, and effective learning environment. It goes beyond simple teaching methods by addressing the deeper emotional and cultural needs of students, which is especially vital for learners from the Global South who may have unique challenges due to colonial

educational histories and a clash of cultures. These key areas should be incorporated into workshops and awareness sessions so teachers can be consciously trained to practice empathy in classrooms" (Teacher Educator 1). Another teacher educator added, "Such programs should allow teachers to reflect on their own learning journeys, both as students and as educators, because without reflection, empathy cannot be fully developed" (Teacher Educator 2).

Mentorship and reflective practices were also seen as essential for fostering empathy in teachers. One teacher emphasized, "Empathy cannot be taught like a subject, but it can be modeled. Mentors play a crucial role in helping teachers understand when they are over-empathizing or struggling with boundaries" (Teacher 1). One of the teacher educators reinforced this idea, stating, "Teachers need mentors to because a mentor can help them assess whether they are under-practicing or over-practicing empathy, and guide them in designing empathetic learning experiences for students" (Teacher Educator 1). Ultimately, participants stressed that teacher training programs must evolve to meet the demands of modern classrooms. One teacher educator concluded, "We need to consciously emphasize empathy in teacher training programs. Reflective exercises, emotional intelligence training, and real-life classroom challenges should be part of these programs so that empathy becomes an embedded practice rather than just an abstract idea" (Teacher Educator 2).

Transforming English Language and English Language Teaching Ideologies

The participants viewed empathy as a catalyst for transforming English language teaching, moving beyond rigid colonial-era

ideologies to a more inclusive and contextually relevant approach. One participant noted, “In Pakistan, English is still viewed as a status symbol, and students often struggle with the burden of proving their proficiency by adopting the one standardized pronunciation. An empathetic teacher can transform this practice by making English a skill rather than a status marker of social class” (Teacher 1). Another participant emphasized, “We need to break the mindset that only ‘perfect’ English is acceptable. Empathy allows students to see English as something they can claim ownership of, rather than something foreign or elitist” (Teacher 5).

Participants optimistically accepted the challenging role of empathy against deep-seated colonial language ideologies by validating students’ linguistic identities and reducing the pressure to conform to native-speaker norms. One teacher explained, “Pakistani students often feel their accents and grammar are constantly judged, which makes them hesitant to speak. When we create a safe, empathetic classroom, they realize that their voice matters, regardless of how ‘native-like’ they sound” (Teacher 9). Another participant pointed out, “Empathy helps us acknowledge that English does not belong to a single culture. It is a global language, and our students have the right to shape it in their own way” (Teacher 2).

The most significant proposition the participants' discussion highlighted was the healing attributes of empathy. The participants opined that empathy is indispensable for students and teachers to address the psychological effects of linguistic imperialism that still linger and often create tensions within the complex multilingual realities of Pakistani English language classrooms. One participant stated, “For years, we have been taught that our local languages are not ‘good enough’ and that

English is superior. This mindset damages self-esteem. An empathetic teacher helps students unlearn this and see bilingualism as strength, not a weakness" (Teacher 8). Another participant shared, "Even we, as teachers, face insecurities. We are teaching a language that we were not raised with, yet we are constantly measured against native speakers. Recognizing this struggle makes us better educators" (Teacher 10). To utilize empathy as a healing agent we need to design our curriculum, teaching methodologies, shift of policies, and contextualized teachers' training programs that move beyond English as a colonial legacy to English as a global lingua franca. This ideological shift also calls for a change in the English language teaching and learning goals and standards for assessment. One teacher emphasized, "If institutions are too rigid in enforcing outdated standards, it becomes difficult for teachers to create inclusive classrooms. There must be flexibility in how we teach and assess English proficiency" (Teacher Educator 2). Another participant suggested, "We need more reflective and student-centered teacher training programs. English should not be about memorization and rigid correctness but about communication and self-expression" (Teacher Educator 1). Only by incorporating all the discussed suggestions, we can try to bring a gradual change in the system and heal the penetrated scars left by linguistic imperialism and colonization.

In sum, participants agreed that empathy can serve as a transformative force for revolutionizing ELT, providing inclusivity, healing the past and deep scars, challenging the traumas of learners, and addressing the specific needs of diverse groups when properly understood and perceived. The main intent should be to make the learners strong and competitive rather than leaving them underserved. One participant summed

it up: “English should not be a gatekeeper. With empathy, we can change how students view English not as a barrier, but as an opportunity to connect with the world on their own terms” (Teacher 2).

Discussion

The results from this study show that empathy, when properly understood, perceived, incorporated in the curriculum, and introduced effectively in training ELTs, could become an effective strategy for healing and transformation in the post-colonial Global South. Empathy in English language teaching is not only an effective strategy for the healing of deep scars left by colonization and rigid pedagogy that sometimes overshadows the identity of learners belonging to the Global South. It also plays a transformative role in shaping students’ learning experiences, especially in the context where language education overlooks social and cultural barriers. The study’s findings culminated in themes focused on fostering an inclusive classroom environment by acknowledging learners’ linguistic stifles, socio-economic backgrounds, and emotional necessities. The participants realized the significance of incorporating empathy in teaching and also the outcomes with and without practicing empathy. According to them, teachers who demonstrate empathy extend their role as mentors and create a sense of belonging, inclusivity, and motivation which enables learners to express, communicate, and feel included. Empathy in teaching helps bridge gaps between learners of diverse backgrounds, reducing anxiety, and fostering confidence in the learning journey. This aligns with previous research indicating that learners in empathetic learning settings are more open to taking risks in language learning, leading to improved linguistic competence (Mercer & McIntyre,

2014). Furthermore, the study also throws light on how empathy can counteract fixed, native-oriented teaching approaches by implementing student-centered learning experiences that encourage critical thinking and self-expression.

Another pertinent implication of these findings is the urgent need for teacher training programs to incorporate empathy in their teaching practices. The teacher educators shared their observations and focused on structured and concrete training to develop awareness and skills in this area. Workshops could integrate reflective teaching practices and customize learning activities, which would prepare English language teachers for fostering empathy an effective strategy. Research suggests that training ELTs in empathetic pedagogy improves their ability to create a psychologically safe learning space, which ultimately benefits learners' engagements and accomplishments (Dewaele & Li, 2020).

The study underscores the significance of empathy within the Pakistani educational context, where the dominance of English is a reminder of Pakistan's colonial past. Empathetic teaching, as reported by participants, is crucial for addressing many factors contributing to learners' struggles in English classes, including diverse linguistic backgrounds, inequitable language-learning opportunities, and entrenched ideologies about the English language. The findings highlight that empathy-driven teaching and mentoring involve realizing these predicaments and implementing strategies that cater to students' varying levels of exposure to English. This resonates with Rahman's (2019) argument that English in Pakistan functions as a gatekeeper, marginalizing students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, despite awareness of postcolonial influences, there is still a struggle to transform teaching and

learning situations. As Rahman (2002) notes, the practice of empathetic teaching and teacher preparation in a postcolonial context like Pakistan differs significantly from Western models due to unique local factors.

Here, in Pakistan, empathetic teaching plays a vital role in dismantling linguistic hierarchies and creating equitable learning environments. Additionally, the study reveals that empathetic language teaching can contribute to decolonizing English by transforming its role from an elitist symbol to a genuine medium of communication in specific contexts. Consequently, valuing students and their linguistic identities and promoting their sense of agency in using English for self-expression, rather than mere compliance with colonial and standardized norms, becomes prevalent. All insights from ELTs and Teacher Educators assert that empathy-driven English language teaching is progressing toward creating a more open, supportive, inclusive, and barrier-free learning environment.

Conclusion

In a postcolonial context, the English language is often associated with colonial history and social hierarchy. Therefore, empathetic teaching must actively work to dismantle these power dynamics. Unlike in a Western setting, where empathy might focus primarily on individual emotional needs, in Pakistan, it must also involve validating students' native languages and cultural identities. This turns empathy into an effective tool that makes students comfortable and fosters a sense of inclusion.
Teacher preparation in this context will not be effective if it merely imitates Western ideologies. Rather, it must be a transformative process that encourages educators to critically reflect on their own biases and their roles within the specific

context of Pakistan. In this regard, the study highlights the vital role empathy can play in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms, especially in Pakistan's public sector universities.

Participants viewed teaching with empathy as possessing transformational and healing potential to address the challenges of the Global South, including the decolonization of English language and ELT. The findings highlight critical areas such as teachers' emotional investment, self-reflection, institutional support, and the role of empathy in student engagement and confidence. While teaching with empathy presents a range of challenges often stemming from the emotional and systemic demands placed on educators developing critical awareness and pedagogical skills can equip educators to implement empathetic practices more effectively.

Participants shared how empathy shapes their classroom interactions but also admitted that a conflict frequently exists between offering emotional support and maintaining rigorous academic standards. They also stressed the importance of structured empathy training, arguing that empathy should not be left to individual discretion but must be integrated into teacher education. The study highlights both the potential and limitations of practicing empathy in ELT within Pakistan’s public higher education institutions. While teachers and teacher educators acknowledged the transformative and healing impact of empathy on students' learning, they simultaneously identified hindrances caused by institutional constraints and colonial legacies.

Contextually, relevant teacher training programs, experience-based learning strategies, customized learning activities, and a shift from superficial workshops to more integrative training can serve as a decolonizing force that could leverage empathy, allowing it to function in its true essence.

Moreover, policy changes are needed to ensure the incorporation of empathetic teaching into national educational frameworks as a systematic, structured, and measurable construct rather than an abstract and impractical notion. Such policy changes would embed empathy into teacher training and curriculum development, ensuring it is evaluated as a core competency for both educators and students.

In conclusion, the current study acknowledges the benefits of empathy in second-language classrooms and emphasizes the strong potential empathetic teaching offers toward decolonizing the English language and its teaching-learning. This pressing need to detach from the colonial ideologies and practices that surround English, a need common to most postcolonial countries in the Global South, holds transformational powers for learners and the societies in which they find themselves.

Future Directions

This study opened new avenues for exploring empathy in ELT by highlighting perspectives and practices that were not addressed sufficiently in the postcolonial context of Pakistan. This concept is critically challenging in educational research. Our study operationalized empathy through a procedural definition, transforming it from an abstract concept into a tangible, measurable construct. With the elevated role of the transformative potential of empathy in revisiting English language ideologies found in this study, challenges were also discussed for future investigations. Future studies should address the study's limitations by exploring methodologies to situate empathy in standardized educational systems mediating between academic rigor and emotional well-being. In conclusion, the current study acknowledges the benefits of empathy in second-

language classrooms and emphasizes the strong potential empathetic teaching offers toward decolonizing the English language and its teaching-learning. This pressing need to detach from the colonial ideologies and practices that surround English, something common to most postcolonial countries like Pakistan within the Global South, holds transformational powers for learners and the societies in which they find themselves. We recognize that future research must incorporate more emic, context-specific methodologies to fully explore how empathy is uniquely perceived and enacted in Pakistan. Consequently, our work serves as a foundational step—a bridge using familiar frameworks to underscore the urgent need for a culturally-sensitive, decolonized approach to teacher training and research in the Global South.

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CHAPTER 11

Language Learning and Forced Migration: Australian Educators on the Relational, Ethical, and Emotional Dimensions of 'Journeying Alongside'

Rachel Burke

Abstract

Language education—always a political act—is especially complex in contexts of forced migration, where displacement can lead to enduring psychological, social, and material challenges. In such settings, educators must draw on both methodological expertise and epistemological sensitivity to support learners' linguistic strengths while recognizing how language acquisition may intersect with narratives of displacement, loss, and trauma. This study investigates how 15 language educators working with forcibly displaced learners in Australia navigate these complexities. Using semi-structured interviews and a narrative inquiry approach, I employ thematic analysis to examine the central role of care—both for others and for self—in shaping pedagogical practice. Drawing on trauma-informed approaches and Ethics of Care (Noddings, 1984, 2005, 2013), this chapter is

structured around four interrelated themes: educator preparedness for 'journeying alongside' learners; the strategic use of experience as a foundation for professional growth; responsive practices that address learner circumstances; and the critical role of educator self-care. In exploring these dimensions, the chapter examines how care is enacted within displacement-affected educational contexts, highlighting the deeply relational and emotional dimensions of 'journeying alongside'.

Keywords: refugee, displacement, forced migration, language, trauma, relational, care

Introduction

Language education—always a political act—is especially complex in contexts of forced migration when learners have been displaced from their homes due to war, poverty, civil unrest or environmental crisis. In such settings, people have usually experienced multiple forms of violence and profound grief and loss, enduring the fragmentation of personal, professional, and community networks (Giacco et al., 2018; Silove et al., 2017). These stressors are often intensified by substantial linguistic barriers encountered during transit and (re)settlement,[25] particularly when individuals have limited time and resources to acquire the dominant language(s) prior to arrival. In fact, such linguistic barriers are identified as a leading cause of distress in forced migration, often contributing to feelings of exclusion,

[25] I use the term (re)settlement to underscore the nuanced and often fluid nature of forced migration. This terminology, first employed in Bogachenko and Burke (2023), acknowledges that while some individuals seek permanent resettlement, others engage in temporary settlement with the intention of returning home should conditions allow.

isolation, and a diminished sense of personal agency (Bogachenko & Burke, 2024; Burke et al., 2023; Choi and Najar, 2017; Heugh, 2017). In such contexts, language education can be a particularly complex endeavor; at once a means of access to power in (re)settlement, yet also a potential reminder of the violence of displacement and resulting impacts on identity, community, and sense of self. In the absence of sensitive and nuanced instructional approaches, language education, already grounded in colonial logics, can inadvertently become a site of further symbolic or structural violence, potentially compounding existing trauma and loss.

As such, in forced migration settings, language educators are tasked with a deeply demanding and emotionally complex role, requiring both pedagogical skill and human sensitivity. Educators must possess methodological and epistemological expertise to effectively build on learners' existing linguistic strengths as foundational resources for acquiring the target language. Equally essential is the sensitivity to understand how language learning may be embedded within broader narratives of trauma, cultural displacement, and identity loss, while also being shaped by enduring frameworks of coloniality. While research focused on trauma and education in forced migration contexts is increasing (Hargrove et al., 2024; Maynard, et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2024), the ways in which language educators—particularly those without lived experience of forced migration—navigate these complex challenges, the resources they draw on, and the practical strategies they employ, remain underexplored. Further, there is limited scholarly discussion concerning the forms of support that underpin and sustain language educator self-care in the context of this critical work.

This study engages with 15 language educators in Australia working across diverse contexts—including higher education, adult education, community language programs, and schools—to support English language acquisition among learners from displacement backgrounds. I consider the following research questions:

- What does it mean to support language learning amid the violence and trauma of forced migration?
- What forms of instructional responsiveness are required of educators working in such contexts?
- How do language educators inform and sustain themselves in this essential work?

In engaging with educator experiences, the central role of care—both care for others and for self—was increasingly evident, highlighting how the work of these language educators extends beyond the teaching of linguistic content to include an understanding of language as social practice, in this case, potentially tied to the burden of loss, trauma, and dislocation. Using the theoretical frameworks of trauma-informed practice (Carello & Butler, 2015; Knight, 2019), Ethics of Care (Noddings, 1984, 2005, 2013) and positive psychology (Derakhshan, 2021, 2022; MacIntyre, et. al, 2019; Mercer & Gregersen, 2023; Seligman & Csikszentmihaly, 2000), this chapter documents both the complexities of language education in forced migration settings and the transformative potential of care-ful and healing-focused approaches to teaching and learning.

A decolonial agenda underpins and informs the discussion throughout, particularly through the conceptualization of language as far more than a technical system or code, but as a

socially embedded practice intimately connected to identity, place, and historical context (Canagarajah, 2023; Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Pennycook, 2017; Macedo, 2019). In keeping with the decolonial orientation, the chapter focuses on the cultivation of relational pedagogies grounded in care and attuned to learners' lived experiences (Canagarajah, 2023). The focus on educator experiences is not intended to dismiss the significance of learner voices, but to allow for the critical examination of language educator perceptions regarding the necessary supports for engaging in the interpersonal, ethical, and emotional dimensions of 'journeying alongside' learners in contexts of forced migration. As will be discussed later, trauma-informed practices, Ethics of Care, and positive psychology can be understood as epistemological frameworks that align with decolonial thought as they foreground relationality, emotional well-being, and human dignity in ways that resist the deficit-based logics of colonial frameworks.

Language Education in Forced Migration: A Potential Site of Further Violence

Language acquisition is one of the most pressing challenges for humanitarian migrants (Bogachenko et al., 2024; Burke et al., 2020, 2023; Burke & Bogachenko, 2025; Reddick, & Chopra, 2023). In Australia, the main language backgrounds for humanitarian migrants entering the country over the past decade include Arabic, Dari, Assyrian, Swahili, Hazaragi, and Farsi (Refugee Council of Australia, 2023). This linguistic diversity reflects the varied geopolitical contexts from which humanitarian entrants originate and underscores the need for tailored language support during resettlement. Highlighting this imperative, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCoA) (n.d.) estimates that

approximately 81% of the 149,051 individuals who arrived on humanitarian visas in the past decade had limited or no English proficiency upon arrival.

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) constitutes the principal government initiative designed to deliver free English language instruction to eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants. The program assists approximately 50,000 to 60,000 individuals annually, offering various learning options, including face-to-face classes, online courses, and volunteer tutor schemes (DoHA, 2025). Further, government funded organizations, such as Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES), are instrumental in delivering community-centered language support. These services encompass conversation classes, structured language instruction, and tailored tutoring programs that prioritize the development of practical English for everyday communication and social integration. Though less visible in academic literature, volunteer-led language education initiatives, often held in public libraries or community centers, also make a vital contribution to migrant language education in Australia.

Regardless of the migration pathway, acquiring the target language often involves navigating conflicting demands—such as the need for linguistic integration alongside the preservation of one's linguistic and cultural identity. However, language learning in the context of forced migration can be particularly complex given the compounded pressures and psychological impacts associated with displacement. People with forced migration experiences often face distinct challenges in acquiring English, often due to the impact of long periods of disrupted education, varied experiences with foundational print literacy, trauma-related barriers, and restricted access to appropriately tailored

learning resources (RCoA, 2019). Additionally, caregiving responsibilities, the urgent necessity to secure employment, and ongoing health concerns—frequently more acute and enduring among humanitarian migrants—further constrain capacity to engage in formal language education (Corbel, 2024). Accordingly, a complex array of intersecting social, psychological, and cultural factors can result in tensions and contradictions that profoundly impact language learners' experiences and outcomes.

Further, while the acquisition of the target language is frequently framed as essential for integration, access to services, and economic participation, this process can also heighten precarity, especially when learners are expected to acquire proficiency rapidly, often without trauma-informed support or recognition of their existing linguistic and educational capital (Block, 2022). Many people with experiences of forced migration report feelings of anxiety, frustration, or shame in language-learning settings, particularly when their ability to communicate is perceived as inadequate or when their accents or linguistic identities are stigmatized (Bigelow, 2010; Burke & Bogachenko, 2025). These dynamics underscore the need for pedagogical approaches that recognize the affective, cultural, and social dimensions of language learning in displacement contexts, which can be further intensified by the necessity of navigating unfamiliar linguistic environments while simultaneously managing profound grief and loss (Pastoor, 2017).

Conceptualizing Language Learning through a Triadic Lens: Trauma-Informed Practice, Positive Psychology, and Ethics of Care

By conceptualizing language learning through the intersecting lenses of trauma-informed practice, positive psychology, and

Ethics of Care, this chapter foregrounds the emotional, ethical, and social dimensions of language learning in forced migration contexts; elements that are frequently overlooked in traditional instructional models.

Trauma-informed practice

Trauma can be understood as a psychological response to profoundly distressing or life-threatening experiences (Krupnik, 2019). In contrast to language anxiety—which is typically limited to language-specific contexts and does not necessarily stem from deep psychological disruption—trauma exerts a pervasive influence across multiple domains of life, including cognitive functioning, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being (MacIntyre, 2017). People from forced migration backgrounds frequently endure prolonged exposure to trauma-inducing events and circumstances such as separation from family and community, severe economic precarity, ethnic, religious, or political persecution, and systemic violations of human rights (Baker & Naidoo, 2024; Silove et al., 2017). Prolonged exposure to trauma often results in heightened stress responses, a persistent state of psychological hypervigilance commonly referred to as operating in 'survival mode', which can remain even after the immediate danger has passed. Further, exposure to trauma can impact emotional regulation and act as a barrier to social engagement (Wilson et al., 2024). Combined, these factors can profoundly impact learners' sense of safety within language learning environments.

Trauma-informed pedagogical frameworks, which originate in public health practices in the 1990s and early 2000s, recognize the pervasive and complex impacts of trauma and seek to cultivate learning environments that prioritize safety,

emotional support, and holistic well-being (Blanco, 2021; Schwartz & McDonald, 2019). These approaches are often referred to as 'healing-focused' and frequently incorporate strategies designed to alleviate performance pressure and offer learners the autonomy to opt out of activities that may exacerbate stress (Beauregard et al., 2024). However, existing research highlights a notable gap in explicit guidance for educators regarding the behavioral manifestations of trauma in learning contexts (Baker & Naidoo, 2023; Wilson et al., 2024). For instance, in a forthcoming publication, my co-author and I examine the significant lack of research into how trauma may shape learners' attitudes toward linguistic risk-taking and their overall engagement in the language classroom (Burke & Bogachenko, 2026). I suggest that colonial legacies remain deeply embedded in dominant language teaching paradigms, which often privilege the perspectives of mainstream academic discourses and Western-centric epistemologies. These approaches frequently overlook learners' lived experiences—particularly their understandings of safety and trauma—and consider language education through the lens of an 'imagined' learner who is typically not from a forced migration background. Trauma-informed instruction is therefore an important conceptual frame for this study as it foregrounds the need for educational approaches that are attuned to learners' lived experiences, sense of safety, and the socio-emotional complexities that shape their engagement with language.

Positive Psychology

The potential erasure of learners' knowledges and lived experiences within traditional approaches to education underscores the need for pedagogical frameworks that

foreground wellbeing, emotional safety, and culturally and relationally responsive engagement. Central to this is recognizing the complex and often deeply personal connections between language and wellbeing. In this context, positive psychology, with its focus on well-being and personal strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), can align with culturally responsive pedagogy and the intention to recognize and build upon the knowledge and resources that learners and educators bring to the language classroom (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Oladrostam et al., 2024). Positive psychology, therefore, offers a means of incorporating a strengths-based, growth orientated philosophy in the trauma informed classroom. Indeed, this branch of psychology offers a valuable lens for understanding language education by shifting the focus from perceived deficits or challenges to learners' inherent strengths, knowledge, and well-being. Importantly, positive psychology also offers a useful frame for understanding educator assets rather than focusing on perceived limitations. This emphasis on strengths—for both learners and educators—is reflected in the experiences documented in this chapter.[26]

Ethics of Care

As the prioritization of subjective well-being in positive psychology resonates with relational ethical paradigms, I was prompted to consider Nell Noddings' (1984, 2013) Ethics of Care as a complementary framework for understanding educator

[26] A critical distinction must be made between positive psychology and commonly critiqued resilience frameworks. While positive psychology foregrounds personal growth, subjective well-being, and the imperative to address systemic barriers, resilience discourses often risk individualizing structural challenges and valorising personal endurance at the expense of acknowledging broader sociopolitical responsibilities.

experiences. Noddings introduced this framework in 1984 as a response to traditional moral theories that emphasized impartiality and rule-based ethics grounded in abstract principles. This model has been applied to educational contexts to argue that teaching and learning should be anchored in caring relational practices rather than solely oriented toward cognitive achievement (Robinson et al., 2020). The Ethics of Care framework, therefore, offers a shift from standardized, impersonal instruction to human-centered pedagogy. It prioritizes relationships, empathy, and the need for educators to recognize and respond to learners' unique backgrounds, experiences, and circumstances. In this framework, care is not merely a personal disposition but a pedagogical stance that recognizes the centrality of human relationships in teaching and learning.

A particularly important element of this model is the recognition that educators also require care to sustain them in their work (Goode et al., 2025). Joan Tronto (1993), who brought a broader political, social, and institutional lens to the Ethics of Care framework, argues that ethical care must include attention to the caregiver's own needs. As this chapter examines the diverse strategies educators employ to sustain their own wellbeing, it also underscores the critical need for institutional support structures that proactively address the risks of burnout and emotional fatigue for people working with trauma-impacted learner groups.

With emphasis on responsive engagement that prioritizes learner wellbeing and values their lived experiences and knowledges, the frameworks of trauma-informed instruction, positive psychology, and Ethics of Care align with the decolonial

agenda in education that seeks to move away from detached, standardized instruction by fostering empathy, mutual learning, and human connection. However, as this chapter will explore, remaining sensitive to the impacts of migration, marginalisation, and displacement within language education is a complex, ongoing, and multifaceted endeavor. Particularly for educators without lived experiences of forced migration, this necessitates critical reflexivity and a commitment to 'journeying alongside' learners while foregrounding their articulated needs and goals as the basis for instruction. The educator narratives that underpin this chapter highlight the nuanced and layered challenges involved in offering responsive, trauma-informed, and inclusive language instruction in contexts of forced migration.

Research Process

As an initial step in the research process, I carried out an informal needs analysis through exploratory conversations with educators working across diverse educational settings to support English language learners in Australia from forced migration backgrounds. These initial discussions provided valuable insights into educators' everyday experiences and informed the development of a set of guiding questions for the semi-structured interviews. These questions were also shaped by my own professional experience as well as insights drawn from the field, enabling deeper exploration of the instructional and emotional demands involved in language instruction in contexts of forced migration. In parallel, I undertook consultation with members of refugee communities and with colleagues engaged in refugee education to ensure that the research design and processes were ethically sound. Approval to conduct the research was attained

from the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee.

Using my professional networks, I then recruited 15 language educators who expressed interest in contributing to research focused on strengthening and supporting language learning outcomes in forced migration. As the research is grounded in a conceptualization of language education as a collective, community-wide endeavor, I included educators working across diverse settings—schools and universities, vocational education, community and volunteer programs—and with varying levels of formal training in language instruction. Further, the educator group includes experienced practitioners in paid employment and community members—such as retirees—who are providing language support on a voluntary basis.

I conducted semi-structured, online interviews with each of the 15 language educators. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed orthographically, capturing participants' spoken words verbatim in written form. Transcription followed standard conventions, with attention to preserving linguistic features relevant to the analysis, such as pauses and emphasis. To foreground their lived experiences and gain insight into the complexities of teaching in contexts shaped by forced migration, I adopted a narrative inquiry approach with a particular focus on critical incidents. This methodological orientation allowed the educators to share significant moments or turning points in their professional practice that revealed deeper epistemological, ethical, and emotional dimensions of their work (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Tripp, 2012). This narrative method was also suited to the research aim of honoring the relational and contextual nature of language education, providing me with the opportunity to witness educator stories

that reflect the diverse settings in which language learning takes place (Clandinin, 2006; Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

Following the interviews, educators were invited to review the transcripts. Several educators opted to provide supplementary data through follow-up emails and online interviews, noting that the initial interview prompted reflective engagement with their practice and led them to identify additional salient insights they wished to contribute to the research. This extended dataset enriched the overall corpus, allowing for a more nuanced manual thematic analysis in which I identified recurring patterns across educator narratives. This approach, grounded in the work of Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019; 2022), involved a rigorous process of familiarization with the data, coding for significant features, and iteratively refining thematic categories related to the navigation of relational, ethical, and instructional elements of working in forced migration contexts. During this analytic phase, I identified the centrality of care as an underlying concept across the data. However, consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidance regarding critical considerations in thematic analysis, I emphasize that these themes were not passively 'emergent' but were actively constructed through my interpretive engagement with the dataset, shaped by my own worldviews and experiences, and guided by the analytic frameworks employed.

The findings of this analysis are presented in the subsequent sections of the chapter, with extracts from the dataset that best illustrate four interrelated dimensions: educator readiness for 'journeying alongside' learners; the purposeful integration of experience as a catalyst for professional growth; adaptive practices that respond to learner contexts; and the essential role of educator well-being in sustaining effective

engagement.[27] Readers are invited to engage reflexively with these themes, and consider how the educator accounts may resonate with, challenge, or illuminate aspects of their own professional and personal experiences. In this way, I hope not only to present findings but to foster dialogic reflection and ongoing interrogation of assumptions, practices, and ethical considerations related to language education in forced migration contexts and intersecting fields.

Educator Preparedness for 'Journeying Alongside'

I commenced each interview by asking educators to describe their instructional context and their pathway into working with learners from forced migration backgrounds. Inevitably, these questions also generated educator reflections on their sense of preparedness for the distinct challenges and potentials associated with teaching in such settings. Notably, the educators who had undertaken a university degree in education reported feeling particularly unprepared to address the multifaceted challenges of language education in contexts of forced migration. While this sense of unpreparedness may stem from the inherent difficulty of anticipating the instructional and emotional demands of such complex environments—particularly for those without lived experience of forced migration— the educators reported a lack of attention to these issues in their undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. They commented that this significant gap in their initial teacher education programs meant that there was a lack of explicit focus on working with learners from refugee backgrounds and the broader sociocultural and ethical dimensions of forced

[27] All educator names are pseudonyms. Ellipsis is used in direct quotes to indicate the omission of material deemed extraneous or irrelevant, while preserving the integrity of the speaker's words.

migration. Further, none of the educators who had completed university qualifications in language education reported that their programs had included a focus on trauma-informed practice.

For instance, Amelia, a language educator working in Technical and Further Education (TAFE), a government provider of vocational education and training (VET) in Australia, advised: "I don't know what it's like in other universities. But there was nothing, nothing to help, nothing about refugees, nothing about settlement…it was purely language…". Jessie, a language educator at university also identified the need to prepare educators for both the linguistic and relational challenges they may encounter:

> Did they prepare me? Probably not. I think academic knowledge per se is useful as long as it can be usefully employed…it's just not academia that you're dealing with in dealing with refugees and asylum seekers. It's a whole cosmos of colliding events that come together, to put them in this place at this time. And I think it's being sensitive to that, that's really important, as well as providing them with the educational support they need. [Jessie, university educator]

Here, Jessie immediately foregrounds the human element of language instruction, with the reference to "a whole cosmos of colliding events that come together" indicating strong awareness of the intersectional challenges encountered by many refugee background learners—a key element of decolonial framing. Further, the reference to needing to be "sensitive to that…as well as providing them with the educational support they need"

indicates an awareness of the role of language educators to move beyond standardized or undifferentiated practice to offer instruction that is responsive to learners' specific needs, life experiences, and goals. This highlights the relevance of Noddings' (1984) Ethics of Care to language instruction in forced migration contexts, underscoring the centrality of relational dimensions in educational practice. In contrast, the educators in this study viewed their initial teacher education programs as emphasizing academic content or exclusive focus on the language itself.

For educators who had received some form of preparation for working in forced migration contexts, these insights were typically acquired through employment-based professional development. Such preparation was evident in both informal, every-day mentoring of peers, and structured professional development opportunities. For instance, Amelia, who teaches at TAFE, advised: "where I've got my training was the wonderful teachers where I teach now, who had been doing it for years, who were just amazing". Likewise, Priscilla, who works in the AMEP advised:

> Yeah, I'd say that…it [issues of trauma] definitely came up in the [professional development] sessions… so we even had, like, a video and talk about people who were actually, you know, the victims of torture…Although it was kind of obvious that's what I was doing. It hadn't occurred to me properly until they kind of covered it. And I went…yeah, okay. I'm walking in on someone else's life. Yeah, so I do feel that I was suitably warned, without knowing the individual circumstance…I wouldn't have got that from the Grad Cert. [Priscilla, AMEP educator]

Priscilla's description of "walking in on someone else's life" poignantly illustrates the expanded role of language educators working with learners from forced migration backgrounds. While this could be interpreted literally as Priscilla works with learners experiencing significant health challenges who, as a result, receive tutoring in their home, a recurring theme across this and other interviews was the recognition that language educators play an integral role as contributors to the broader social and emotional landscapes of learners' lives as they navigate (re)settlement. Again, this aligns with the Ethics of Care (Noddings, 1984) framing of education as a socially embedded practice, rather than solely focused on content.

However, Priscilla also expressed a sense of unpreparedness for addressing the specific and complex circumstances faced by the individuals she teaches:

> And I had no idea…really what I was walking into with these two. Originally, I looked up because…all I knew was they were from Myanmar, and I looked up…Rohingyas and Rohingya refugees and I thought, oh, my goodness. I was really freaked out. And then thought, well, all I can do is help them speak English. So, you know, I'll do that. [Priscilla, AMEP educator]

These experiences underscore educators' appreciation for employment-based professional learning opportunities; however, they also suggest that certain dimensions of this work can only be fully grasped through direct engagement in the field. In recounting her sense of apprehension prior to commencing lessons, Priscilla's attitude also reflects an orientation toward positive psychology—emphasizing possibilities and strengths rather than adopting deficit-based perspectives regarding her

own professional capacities: “all I can do is help them speak English. So, you know, I’ll do that” (Priscilla).

Learning from Experience

The general absence of formal preparation for working with individuals from forced migration backgrounds—especially among educators whose teacher education programs lacked the relevant content and who did not receive targeted professional development—resulted in practitioner learning being predominantly shaped by experiential knowledge acquired in the field. This also meant that most educators in this study were initially unprepared for the level of trauma that learners may carry and the various ways in which this pain can become manifest during language instruction.

> I certainly discovered over time, and you only discover this when you make an appalling mistake, that the experience of some of the clients in their home countries, where they’ve come from, were quite traumatic. And many of these people had not necessarily travelled either recently or at all through the supported migrant experience. And so that trauma lives still within them, and had not been, you know, helped through, supported. [Cee Bee, volunteer educator]

This notion that trauma “still lives within them” reflects Cee Bee’s awareness of the enduring impacts of forced migration for mental health and wellbeing even years after (re)settlement. It also suggests a keen awareness that learning a new language involves using a new code to make sense of life experiences, and, in the case of many learners with forced migration backgrounds,

this will inevitably include communicating about trauma and loss.

Related to Cee Bee's reference to learning from mistakes, each of the educators recalled how seemingly benign topics that commonly feature in language classes and materials can trigger painful memories for learners with forced migration experiences. For instance, Tania, a volunteer language educator, described:

> I was in class the other day, and I think we were doing conditionals, and I wasn't thinking at first and [I asked], like, "Oh, if you could live anywhere in the world, where would you be?" and I just saw this sad effect and I thought, oh no, I've brought up something painful and I just sort of changed the topic. But maybe she [the learner] did want to talk about it that day. Yeah, to be honest, I could do with sensitivity training around understanding things like that and what they're going through. They always taught me in ESL, you just stay away from religion and politics and keep things easy. And, you know, as the relationship develops, things come up more naturally as well. [Tania, volunteer educator]

Here, while explaining how she attempts to avoid raising issues that may be distressing for learners, Tania also recognized that as rapport increases, learners may want to share their experiences. Again, this reflects the Ethics of Care framing that sees education as far more than just the delivery of content but as a relational and dialogic process grounded in empathy, mutual respect, and attentiveness to learners' lived experiences. It also reflects educators' sensitivity to the nuanced challenges of identifying learners' individual preferences concerning the discussion or avoidance of trauma-related experiences, alongside

an awareness of the potential emotional impact such topics may have on other students within the classroom context.

In reflecting on the supports and resources they employ to offer responsive education, educators also described drawing upon their own lived experiences of exclusion to inform their practice. Although none of the participants in this study are from a forced migration background and each person acknowledged that such trauma cannot be fully comprehended without direct lived experience, they sought to engage empathetically by reflecting on their own encounters with being a 'linguistic outsider'. For instance, Chloe, a university language educator, advised:

> I lived overseas for five and a half years in India, Vietnam and Japan, so I guess you could say, in a very limited way, I have had some experience feeling…I wouldn't say it's anywhere like a refugee or refugee-like experience but, you know, just feeling a little bit different sometimes or, you know, that kind of experience. [Chloe, university educator]

Here, Chloe is keenly aware that she cannot ever fully understand what it means to be forcibly displaced, however, she draws on her own challenging experiences as a lens to critically reflect on the potential obstacles and achievements within the language learning journey. While each educator emphasized the importance of adopting a highly reflexive stance, the practice of drawing on personal experiences of adversity or exclusion to attune to learners' potential needs aligns with the concept of post-adversity growth. This notion—central to positive psychology—suggests that individuals may develop greater

sensitivity, empathy, and compassion through reflecting on challenging life experiences.

Being Responsive to Learner Circumstances

As the educators reflected on the stressors that learners with displacement backgrounds experience—including ongoing health issues, financial pressures, caregiving responsibilities, employment concerns, social isolation, and ongoing anxiety about loved ones in their countries of origin—it became evident that each educator had a deeply contextualized appreciation of learners' circumstances and priorities. In turn, such understanding, cultivated incrementally and grounded in trust and a commitment to non-intrusiveness, informs the development of responsive instructional practices that align with learners' individual circumstances and priorities. For example, Priscilla, a volunteer language educator working with refugee background language learners who navigate complex health needs, described how she reflects on insights into learners' circumstances to tailor her instruction to their linguistic, social, health, and cultural requirements in (re)settlement.

> So, you know, they don't get out much. Hubby has quite a significant injury. He's got...I've just found out, one quite long-term chronic injury that happened when he was in a refugee camp, and another one that's happened in Australia...So, you know, they're not off gallivanting about doing these things, you know? I don't know, [the provided learning material] just assumes...they're already immersed in some kind of Australian culture...And they're not. Yeah, so I had to really get a feel for that. [Priscilla, volunteer educator]

Priscilla explained how she adapts existing teaching materials and creates her own resources when she finds that the available content is insufficient or irrelevant to the learners' context. Offering advance access to these materials to support effective preparation, Priscilla also noted that the learners she is working with are particularly interested in Australia's physical geography and varied landscapes, but do not have opportunities to experience these first-hand due to health issues. In response, Priscilla designs her own learning materials, not only reflecting her commitment to contextualizing learning, but also contributing to sustained learner engagement.

Similarly, Blaze, a school-based educator, emphasized the importance of moving beyond a narrow focus on learners' language proficiency to foster meaningful engagement with families, communities, and relational networks that support individual well-being.

> I definitely do see care as a core part. And I think, the foundations are really built upon building relationships, having that compassion, you know, and having it from the beginning, but also seeing the families through, not only from, you know, enrolment day one, but also throughout their journey…And it's just important, really, to take a moment and have a look at their journeys, and just see what you can offer them. Every family is going to be different. Every student is going to be different…you are there for the family as a whole, and [it is important] that the family knows that. [Blaze, school educator]

Blaze's approach of engaging with families and communities reflects a relational Ethic of Care that is extended

beyond the classroom to include the learner's broader social environment. These relational networks are not only central to learners' emotional wellbeing but also instrumental in cultivating a sense of belonging and readiness to engage in educational environments. Strong home-school connections can be particularly important in contexts of forced migration where families may be experiencing significant ongoing trauma, cultural disconnection, and intergenerational conflict as they navigate (re)settlement. Recognizing and valuing the cultural, emotional, and experiential knowledge that families bring to educational settings is essential for fostering meaningful home–school partnerships that support both learner wellbeing and inclusive instructional practice (Anderson, et al., 2023; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019).

Educator Self-Care

For several educators, the emotional and psychological demands associated with language instruction for learners experiencing these challenges accumulated incrementally over time, often going unacknowledged until they became overwhelming. While these educators initially managed these responsibilities as part of their broader professional role, the gradual build-up of stress and emotional fatigue ultimately proved unsustainable. The experiences point to broader concerns within the literature regarding the hidden emotional labor of teaching in high-stakes, care-intensive environments (O'Toole & Friesen, 2016; Sun et al., 2026), particularly when working with populations such as people with experiences of forced migration. For instance, Chloe, a university language educator, explained:

> I became very involved in a lot of students' lives and, you know, it was sustainable probably for about two years, maybe, and then it just became…it becomes too much, I think, because the support that the students need is…yeah, it's exhausting, to be honest. And I found that the students wanted me to do all that stuff. You know, I could say, "Oh, look, you can go and see this person about this thing," "No, no, no…I just want to be with you,"…So yeah, it was an exhausting role, but I enjoyed it. But I'm glad that I'm not doing it anymore, to be honest. [Chloe, university educator]

When reflecting on why learners tended to approach her for support instead of accessing dedicated services, Chloe suggested that face-to-face interaction is often preferred for refugee background learners, with digital or remote modalities often posing significant barriers. The presence of an empathetic educator fosters trust and facilitates meaningful rapport, underscoring the value of relational engagement in educational settings. This aligns with existing literature highlighting that learner groups with experiences of trauma often prefer to seek support from trusted individuals or familiar community networks, rather than from formal institutional services that may feel impersonal or inaccessible (Baker et al., 2017; Kong et al., 2016).

Chloe also noted that the relational proximity of language educators positions them to witness learner disclosures of traumatic experiences, which often emerge spontaneously during routine classroom interactions or in informal moments following instruction. When I asked how Chloe would respond to such disclosures, she described developing strategies to sensitively redirect students to appropriate counselling services without

invalidating their experiences: “I learnt to try to not push away, but sort of try and stop hearing those things and saying, ‘I really think you need to go and see one of our counsellors’”. Chloe reflected on the cumulative emotional impact of regularly hearing learners share experiences of trauma and distress, explaining that, over time, her role became unsustainable due to the intensity of these affective and pastoral components.

When asked how they manage self-care, most educators identified collegial support as their primary means of maintaining emotional well-being. In a similar way to the provision of professional development opportunities related to trauma-informed instruction, educators working within the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) appeared to benefit from the most structured and formalized systems for accessing ongoing support. For instance, Priscilla responded positively to questions about self-care explaining:

> I'd have no trouble e-mailing [my supervisor], and then, if necessary, hooking up a call with [my supervisor], and she would be there for me. She's amazing…I'd have no problem doing it, and she'd be ready for my call if I did. [Laughs] [Priscilla, volunteer educator]

School-based educators also recognized the value of formal support systems and professional development opportunities, particularly in enhancing their understanding of issues such as vicarious trauma. However, in the context of day-to-day practice, colleagues were consistently identified as the primary source of support. Blaze, a school educator, emphasized the central role that peer relationships play in providing emotional and professional grounding, explaining “We kind of

pick each other up if we need. You know we check in…because it is tricky. It gets heavy. It's hard". This peer support described by Chloe, Priscilla, and Blaze exemplifies how care for the caregiver is enacted through collegial relationships, sustaining educators emotionally and professionally. While Chloe acknowledged the value of collegial support in managing the emotional demands associated with her role as a university language educator, she also emphasized the pressing need for more robust institutional support structures within higher education. This introduces an additional dimension of care: the imperative for institutions, including universities, to demonstrate care for educators through the provision of meaningful, targeted, and contextually relevant support mechanisms. This reflects Joan Tronto's (1993) assertion that care is not solely a private or interpersonal concern, but rather a shared, public, and institutional responsibility that must be embedded within the structures and practices of society.

Discussion

Within the educator narratives that underpin this research, the theme of "walking in on someone else's life"—poignantly expressed by Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) educator Priscilla—is a recurring thread. Perhaps more so than in other domains of language education, educators working in displacement contexts encounter learners in the aftermath of profound disruption and loss. As a result, the social and relational dimensions of teaching and learning become especially salient, requiring heightened sensitivity to learners' emotional well-being, lived experiences, and the broader socio-political conditions shaping their engagement with education. This emphasis on relationality and responsiveness aligns with decolonial perspectives, which call for a reorientation of

educational practices away from universalist assumptions and toward approaches that honor learners' knowledge, agency, and histories.

In keeping with this decolonial orientation, the educators in this study conceptualize their roles in these holistic and socially embedded terms, differentiating their language instruction to actively acknowledge the issues impacting learner wellbeing in (re)settlement and the intersecting challenges they face. This requires a nuanced balancing act: educators seek to cultivate trauma-informed learning environments rooted in rapport and trust, while remaining mindful not to overstep personal boundaries or intrude upon learners' lived experiences. Jessie, a university educator, encapsulated this tension by highlighting the importance of creating space for learner engagement without imposing it, noting the need to be "sensitive to" the "whole cosmos of colliding events that come together" to bring learners to the (re)settlement context.

In this sense, educators demonstrated a reflexive awareness of their positionality, particularly as people without lived experiences of forced migration, consistently recognizing learners as experts in their own lives and learning trajectories. In doing so, they acknowledged the limits of their understanding and the importance of remaining attuned to learner cues. For example, Tania thoughtfully reflected on her decision to change the topic after perceiving signs of distress during a task that invited learners to imagine the place that they would most like to be located. While her initial response demonstrated a considered approach to learner wellbeing, she later questioned whether this shift may have inadvertently closed off an opportunity for the learner to express her feelings. In this context, Tania acknowledged the inherent complexities of navigating such

classroom situations, including the impossibility of ever fully discerning learners' preferences. She also emphasized the potential value of professional development to support her ongoing reflection and responsiveness to these challenges.

Of course, it must be noted that language educators are not necessarily trained psychologists, and all 15 participants in this study recognized the importance of referring learners to specialist support services when appropriate. At the same time, they acknowledged that issues related to social and emotional wellbeing significantly shape learner engagement within the language classroom. In alignment with trauma-informed pedagogical approaches, educators expressed a commitment to differentiating their practice in ways that are responsive to these complex and intersecting needs. This necessitates a flexible and adaptive approach to instructional strategies and learning materials. Examples of such responsiveness included providing materials ahead of class, designing bespoke resources that reflected learners' interests and lived experiences, and creatively integrating elements of the outside world into classroom activities—particularly when complex health issues limited learner mobility. In school-based settings, this extended to active engagement with families and broader support networks, underscoring the role of language educators not only as facilitators of linguistic development but also as key actors within a wider ecosystem of support.

Ongoing professional learning, collegial collaboration, and reflective practice play a pivotal role in enabling educators to navigate the emotional and pedagogical complexities of teaching in forced migration contexts. While educators frequently expressed feeling overwhelmed by the complex and often distressing circumstances faced by learners with forced migration

backgrounds—and by the emotional weight of what Priscilla, described as the task of "walking in on someone else's life"—they also articulated a pragmatic and compassionate approach to their work. Rather than becoming overwhelmed by the enormity of these challenges, they focused on what was within their capacity, viewing language education as a meaningful entry point through which they could offer support, foster connection, and contribute positively to learners' broader settlement and wellbeing journeys. Accordingly, educators positioned themselves as part of a relational and ethical framework of care, rather than as isolated providers of language instruction.

The research also indicates that many educators draw on their own past experiences of adversity as a means of empathizing with and anticipating the challenges faced by learners. While they acknowledged that the complexities of forced migration can only be fully understood through lived experience, educators demonstrated a strong commitment to leveraging their personal insights and emotional resources to respond supportively and ethically. This approach resonates with principles from positive psychology, particularly the emphasis on post-traumatic growth and the capacity to derive meaning and resilience from difficult life experiences (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In educators' reflections on their own missteps and learning trajectories, such as Cee Bee's reference to making "appalling mistakes", a theme of self-compassion emerged as a critical aspect of professional care. Rather than engaging in harsh self-judgment, participants recognized the value of acknowledging their good intentions, accepting the limitations of their knowledge, and viewing mistakes as opportunities for professional growth.

Educator experiences also highlight the need for better institutional recognition and support for the emotional labor undertaken in forced migration contexts. Although language educators should always refer learners to appropriate specialist services, the socially embedded nature of language learning means that learners' experiences—particularly those involving trauma or displacement—inevitably influence their participation in the classroom. Engaging with learners who have experienced the trauma and violence of displacement often requires educators to assume not only instructional responsibilities but also considerable emotional labor. This aspect of care work necessitates sustained, contextually responsive professional support to safeguard educator wellbeing (Noddings, 2013). For some of the educators in this study, particularly those working in universities, institutional structures failed to align with the realities of their role and did not provide adequate support to protect their wellbeing. Several educators reflected on the personal toll, including Chloe for whom the role of university language educator became unsustainable after two years,

Another key area of need to emerge from this research is the perceived lack of preparedness for working in specific contexts of forced migration, and the critical need for university-based language teacher education programs to more effectively integrate content related to trauma, displacement, and (re)settlement. While certain aspects of working with refugee-background learners inevitably require experiential learning in the field, the absence of adequate preparation in initial teacher education programs may leave educators underprepared for the complex challenges that may arise in these contexts. This gap in preparation not only heightens the risk of professional and emotional strain for educators themselves but may also

inadvertently compromise the safety, well-being, and outcomes of the learners that they support. These findings also underscore the importance of rethinking traditional models of language educator preparation to assist them to better support the diverse experiences of learners with refugee backgrounds. As we have commented elsewhere "If core concepts and practices underpinning language education are calibrated to the experiences of a 'conventional' or 'imagined' learner, we risk further excluding already marginalized populations" (Burke & Bogachenko, 2026, p.260).

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the multifaceted nature of language education in contexts of forced migration, foregrounding the centrality of care—both for others and for self—as an instructional imperative. Educator experiences reveal how language teaching in these settings extends beyond linguistic instruction to encompass language as a socially embedded practice, deeply intertwined with narratives of trauma, loss, and dislocation. Through the theoretical lenses of trauma-informed practice, Ethics of Care, and positive psychology, the discussion has traced the transformative potential of healing-centered approaches that honor relationality and emotional well-being, with the educators in this study describing how they commit to adaptive instructional practices that address learners' complex and intersecting strengths and needs. Importantly, educator accounts also identify the need for enhanced institutional acknowledgement and support of the emotional labor involved in teaching within forced migration contexts. Amid the ongoing global displacement crisis, robust institutional frameworks that

acknowledge and sustain educator wellbeing are urgently required.

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PART III

Unsettling Normativity for Inclusion and Social Justice

CHAPTER 12

Promoting Students' Critical Consciousness, Agency, and Empathy Through Critical Language Awareness (CLA) Writing Pedagogy

Shawna Shapiro

Abstract

This chapter posits that a Critical Language Awareness (CLA) approach to writing instruction offers a viable pathway toward meeting the aims of decolonization and positive psychology—particularly when it comes to supporting students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. After unpacking this argument, I present a college writing course entitled "Writing and Power" as an application of this approach, describing how the course topics, materials, and assignments promoted students' agency and empathy as communicators. I provide excerpts from student writing that help to illustrate their uptake of key learning goals and conclude with some potential shortcomings of the course that I hope to address in future iterations, as well as suggestions for how writing/language instructors in other contexts might

create “CLA moments” (Shapiro, 2022a) in their own classrooms, to leverage similar benefits for their students.

Keywords: writing, multilingual, linguistic diversity, critical language awareness (CLA), inclusive pedagogy

Introduction

In recent years, a number of scholars have articulated the need for more attention to issues of well-being as they intersect with critical pedagogies (see Introduction, this volume). This need is particularly prominent when it comes to students from diverse linguistic backgrounds in college writing classrooms. For many such students, academic writing often feels alienating and disempowering, because of unclear expectations, unhelpful or even hurtful feedback, and grading practices that are often inconsistent and punitive. This in turn hinders students’ sense of belonging and agency in higher education (Shapiro, 2020). There have been many calls for asset-based and linguistically responsive approaches to multilingual and multidialectal writers, but there is a need for more models of what this instruction looks like in practice (e.g., Losey & Shuck, 2022). Moreover, we need more discussion of how criticality and well-being intersect within these models.

These questions are at the center of this case study of a class entitled “Writing and Power” that employed a Critical Language Awareness (CLA) approach to build confidence and sense of community in a mixed group of multilingual/L2 and L1 English writers. In the sections below, I first define CLA, linking it to the core concepts of this collection: decoloniality and positive psychology. I then provide an overview of the course design, including instructional topics and materials, assignment

design, and student responses to those assignments. Throughout this overview, I highlight student responses, including excerpts from student work illustrating their developing critical consciousness, agency, and empathy. In the conclusion, I discuss some changes I might make to future iterations of the course and offer suggestions for how other instructors can incorporate CLA into their writing/literacy courses, even if CLA is not their primary focus. I hope this case study offers insights and examples that inspire other teachers in their work to empower student writers with a range of language backgrounds.

CLA as an Approach to Academic Writing, and a Decolonizing Force

A Critical Language Awareness (CLA) approach to academic writing aims to build mindsets and skillsets for working at the intersection of language, identity, power, and privilege (Gere et al., 2021; Shapiro, 2022a). The approach goes back decades (see Chapter 2 of Shapiro, 2022a) but it has only been taken up more recently within U.S. composition/writing studies, in response to growing concerns about the treatment of writers from diverse linguistic backgrounds—both multilingual and multidialectal. As Shapiro (2022a) explains,

> a CLA approach is committed to **both** pragmatism (i.e., making sure students have what they need to be able to write for the academy/world as it is today) **and** progressivism (i.e., making sure we are working toward a more equitable and inclusive academy/world for tomorrow). (p. 68, emphasis original).

This dual commitment to pragmatism and progressivism is central as well to decolonization movements in higher education. The process of decolonization in higher education requires that we radically rethink the values, beliefs, and practices that inform our curricula, while still making sure that students are prepared for success within an academy that often holds on tightly to its colonial legacy. In the case of academic writing instruction, research has found that traditional curricula in the Global North, particularly the United States, tend to emphasize individualism, competition, intellectual ownership, and dualism—concepts that contribute to the alienation of students from other cultural backgrounds (Canagarajah 2022; Kubota, 2022). These features contrast with prominent values in the Global South, including relationality, which is informed by a more collectivist, community-oriented mindset in writing (Canagarajah, 2024).

One manifestation of this alternative mindset is what other scholars have called "reader-responsible" composing, in which it is assumed that writers and readers co-construct meaning, as opposed to "writer-responsible" text, in which little is asked of the reader in terms of meaning-making. The former approach foregrounds "communicative ecology" (i.e., "mutual concern for the claims and interests of all parties involved in communication"; Canagarajah, 2024, p. 284), while the latter prioritizes content over relationship and text over context (p. 283).

Canagarajah (2024) also points out that decolonization cannot be decoupled from raciolinguistics, since "colonization involved white European nations conquering colored communities and imposing their ways of looking at the world" (p. 285), including by prioritizing colonial languages in schools,

government, and other high stakes situations. We see remnants of this history in the persistence of "'native speaker' norms, deficient orientations to multilingual students, and biased pedagogies" within literacy instruction (Canagarajah, 2024, p. 285; see also Motha, 2014). Thus, a decolonial approach to academic writing must engage explicitly with (de)colonial ideologies as they relate to race and language—a shift within second language writing, which has attempted to avoid these kinds of issues, with the goal of being politically "neutral" (Santos, 2012).

However, as Kubota (2022) explains, there is often a tension between the ideological aspirations of decolonization and the pragmatic concerns that drive academic writing instruction. Although we certainly need a values shift in how academic writing is taught in the Global North, *how do we prepare students to write within an academy that has not yet made that shift more broadly*? This question is particularly important given that students in higher education often expect that their writing/composition courses will prepare them for the rhetorical expectations they will face as they move through the academic curriculum. Can a curriculum with the explicit goal of decolonization still serve this purpose? Put another way, can an academic writing curriculum be **idealistic** in its commitment to decolonization but also **pragmatic** in preparing students to achieve their goals within higher education and beyond?

More almost three decades ago, Pennycook (1997) forwarded a "yes" response to this question, drawing on the philosophical concept of "critical pragmatism" to capture a vision for language/literacy instruction that questions the status quo while also providing students with the insights and instruction they need to work within that status quo (see also Ruecker &

Shapiro, 2020). A CLA approach to writing instruction works toward this same goal, cultivating critical consciousness about language, in addition to building students' skillsets as language users, so that they are able to critique but also employ, when necessary, rhetorical practices that may have colonialist histories (Gere et al, 2021; Janks, 2010; Lorimer Leonard & Shapiro, 2023). This dual goal is particularly important when it comes to multilingual and multidialectal students, who are often disadvantaged by the status quo—in particular by a monolingual, Anglo-centric ideology that idealizes native speakers and prioritizes standardized English over other language varieties (Arnold, 2020; Canagarajah, 2024).

CLA and Positive Psychology

In addition to its affordances in decolonizing the curriculum, a CLA approach is nicely aligned with the goals of positive psychology. Research has found that attending to social and emotional wellbeing in writing classes enhances students' learning and growth as communicators and increases their sense of belonging in the academy (Belli, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2023; Shapiro, 2020). Traits such as empathy, curiosity, self-reflexivity. and perseverance are crucial to students' social, intellectual, and rhetorical engagement in writing classes, but these traits must be cultivated intentionally, rather than assumed (Belli, 2016; Huerta et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 2023).

Such capacities are particularly important with a CLA approach, which, as Shapiro (2022a) frames it, "engages our hearts, minds, and bodies" (p. 65) in "critical conversations about language, identity, privilege, and power" as part of writing instruction (p. 330). Such conversations can be especially helpful for students from marginalized language backgrounds, who often

experience academic writing as an alienating and anxiety-producing (Huerta et al., 2017). By attending closely and critically to language, students begin to see language difference as a resource, rather than a deficit (Canagarajah, 2002). This approach helps students read and write with greater empathy and self-efficacy (Aull & Shapiro, 2025; Shapiro, 2022a).

Centering Agency, Reflection, and Justice through a CLA Approach

At the heart of CLA approaches to writing is a commitment to building students' sense of agency, helping them to make more informed choices about language use in their writing, and perhaps in other parts of their lives. While some scholars have emphasized "transgressive" rhetorical practices such as translanguaging (e.g., Canagarajah & Dovchin, 2020; Horner & Tetreault, 2017) as prominent examples of student agency, others have pointed out that a focus on resistance alone places students in a bind that may limit their rhetorical options as writers and language users (e.g., Janks, 2000; 2010; Shapiro, 2022a).

A CLA approach aims to offer a more hopeful and expansive response to the very real concerns about linguistic oppression by engaging students in explorations of both normative and non-normative writing features and practices, so that writers can choose for themselves when to conform and when to resist those norms. Put another way, the question at the heart of a CLA approach is not *How can we help student writers to resist dominant norms and conventions?*" but rather, *How can we help student writers to understand, contextualize, and make informed choices about those norms and conventions?*

This latter question is centered on what Shapiro (2022a) calls *rhetorical agency*. Of course, agency is always shaped and

often constrained by existing structures (e.g., Shapiro et al., 2016), so a CLA approach must prepare students to navigate this interplay.

It is worth elaborating on what makes a CLA approach to writing instruction different from other justice-oriented approaches, including those advanced by critical literacy scholars in the 1990s and early 2000s. One of the criticisms made of those early approaches was that they focused too heavily on "domination" — i.e., the ability to recognize harmful ideologies and acknowledge oppression--and less on building the capacity for "design" — i.e., the ability to use language in meaningful and empowering ways— (Janks, 2000). Indeed, without this design component, students from underrepresented language backgrounds may feel "stuck" in a position of marginality, with little hope for achieving integration and sense of belonging in the academy (Janks, 2000; Shapiro, 2022a). Thus, with a CLA approach, critical consciousness and agency work hand in hand.

In order to achieve these dual goals, students need opportunities for deep reflection and critical inquiry about language. Some of the questions explored within a CLA-oriented curriculum include:

- What roles does language serve in your day-to-day life?
- How are language, discrimination, and justice interconnected—including at school?
- When have you or others experienced marginalization because of language?
- What linguistic biases have you held that you may not have questioned before?

By engaging questions like those above, a CLA approach provides a hopeful and pragmatic approach to language difference—one that is particularly well-suited to multilingual and multidialectal writers. Through this approach, student writers better understand themselves, each other, and language itself, developing increased agency and empathy, as well as critical consciousness as language users.

Course Context

The course at the center of this chapter, “Writing and Power,” has been offered for many years at Middlebury College under other names—first as “Writing Workshop” and later as “Writing in Academic Contexts.” The Writing & Rhetoric Program, in which the course is housed, chose to change the name to "Writing and Power" several years ago, both to reflect a more explicit focus on critical issues within course materials and to draw in students who might benefit from the course but are resistant to a class that sounds “remedial” in nature. An important piece of context is that this course is not a requirement for any student: It is a credit-bearing elective that students choose to take, usually out of interest in the material and/or a desire to grow as writers (or both). There are a few students, however, who are strongly encouraged to take the course, based on a writing self-assessment survey they complete prior to course registration. The survey asks each student about their writing experiences, practices, and attitudes, and may generate a recommendation that students consider adding the course, in consultation with their advisors. Here is the official course description, with a few logistical notes deleted:

> Power: who has it, who doesn't, and what does it have to do with your writing? This course both instructs students in how to access power in academic contexts and to critique power structures. We'll learn how power connects to literacy, and how it's shaped through rhetorical contexts. Students will explore their own power as writers and thinkers while engaging in meaningful personal, reflective and argumentative writing. The professor will work with each student extensively on their writing process and development, and we'll create a writing community.

Student Demographics

The majority of the students in "Writing and Power" tend to be multilingual or multidialectal. This includes international students who completed much of their secondary school coursework in a language other than English, as well as immigrant/refugee-background students who may not have had strong college preparatory writing instruction, because their U.S. high schools were under-resourced. There are also some students of color who use varieties other than standardized English at home (e.g., African American Vernacular English; Chicano/x English), or who do not feel a strong sense of mastery of academic writing.

In the section from Fall 2024, which is the focus of this chapter, there were 13 students total: five White students who grew up using primarily or only English in the home, one Black/African American student who grew up using both standardized English and African American Vernacular English, and seven students (six of whom are students of color) who grew up in multilingual homes, from both immigrant and international backgrounds. I will discuss the work of some of these students

more in-depth later in the chapter. All students whose work is referenced here have granted permission in writing and were given the option of using their first name or a pseudonym of their choosing

Features of the Curriculum

There were four features of my iteration of "Writing and Power" that helped not only to promote student learning but also to build critical consciousness, agency and empathy in relation to language. The first two have to do with course content: 1) the selection of accessible and engaging topics and materials and 2) the explicit focus on demystifying academic writing. The latter two features are related to assignments, in which students had 3) opportunities to conduct inquiry on topics that matter to them, and 4) a final project involving peer-to-peer communication about an issue or topic related to the course. Below I elaborate on each of these features and discuss patterns observed in student work, which help to illustrate how a CLA approach enhances student learning, in keeping with the goals of decolonization and positive psychology.

Accessible and Relevant Topics and Materials.

Below are the key course themes, as well as the authors and titles of the readings/media we used as an entryway into exploring those themes. Most of these materials are freely available online (see URLs in References list).

Table 1

Course Topics and Materials

Theme	Author	Title

Language and thought	Boroditsky (2011)	"How Language Shapes Thought"
	Burkley (2017)	"Why Metaphors Are Important"
Language and social relationships	Pinker (n.d.) lecture illustrated w/ RSA animate	"Language as a Window into Human Nature"
Language, gender, and power	Tannen (1995)	"The Power of Talk: Who Gets Heard and Why"
	McBee (2018)	"My Voice Got Deeper. Suddenly, People Listened"
Language, race, and power	McWhorter (2024)	"Harris Gonna Code Switch"
	Fattal 2018	"Why Do Cartoon Villains Speak in Foreign Accents?
Linguistic profiling	Baugh (2019)	"The Significance of Linguistic Profiling"
	Shapiro (2022b)	"Linguistic Profiling: An Under-Recognized Force in the Justice System and Beyond"
	hooks (1994)	"Language: Teaching New Worlds/New Words"

Controversies around standardized English and racial equity	CCCC (2020), authored by Baker-Bell et al.	"DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice

Most of these materials are written/created for general audiences, which made them highly accessible to students. Moreover, the themes they address have real-world relevance for students' lives, both in school and in the larger society. Students usually had a great deal to share in relation to the materials. For example, after watching the Pinker (n.d.) video, which discusses how indirect language can be used in strategic ways—including as a power move—many students shared their own anecdotes and observations about indirect language. Similarly, after reading Fattal (2018), which discusses accent stereotypes in children's animation, students enjoyed identifying other examples of animated characters with "foreign" or otherwise "marked" accents (e.g., Southern American English; Black/African American English). They also began asking questions about the long-term effects of children's early and frequent exposure to these accent stereotypes. In the final unit, when discussing standardized English and academic writing instruction, we had a vibrant discussion about how teachers might recognize the harms of prioritizing standardized English without disadvantaging students who might need this language variety to be academically and professionally successful (see also Arnold, 2020 and Shapiro, 2022a). Thus, we see in the choice of materials a commitment to helping students understand power dynamics around language,

as part of their critical consciousness. We also see the focus on student agency and empathy, as students had opportunities to connect around shared experiences with language use.

Focus on Demystifying Academic Writing

While the course promoted a critical consciousness about language—including how academic language can be exclusionary or oppressive—another essential goal of the course was to ensure students had greater access to some of the dominant conventions of academic writing, so that they could employ those conventions when they wished. Some of the texts and activities we engaged with to promote this access include:

- Learning strategies for engaging effectively with academic readings, such as Shapiro's (2022a) "3-2-1" framework, which asks students to come to class with 3 main ideas, 2 connections, and 1 question, in order to be prepared for discussion. (Many students have said this simple strategy transformed how they engage with readings in all of their classes!)
- Reading a few chapters of Graff and Birkenstein's (2021) *They Say, I Say,* which emphasizes the idea that student writing is often a form of conversation between what students are reading and discussing (i.e., "they say") and how they wish to respond (i.e., "I say").
- Writing a summary/response to Graff and Birkenstein (a common genre of writing at Middlebury), responding to their argument, including their opinion of the authors' choice to include "templates" that students can use to begin to model "they say" and "I say" elements in their writing.

- Practicing writing "Support Sandwiches" in class, in which students build a paragraph around textual or other evidence, and then workshopping those paragraphs together.
- Experimenting with the use of Generative AI tools as part of the research and writing process. (see Gegg-Harrison & Shapiro, 2025, for more on centering student agency in relation to Generative AI, in keeping with a CLA approach)

Through explicit discussion of topics that are often overlooked within higher education instruction, students build a sense of **agency,** realizing that questions such as "How do professors expect me to read these assigned texts?" and "How do I incorporate evidence into my argument?" are welcome and worth asking. This helps to demystify the norms of the academy and counteract the assumption that "everyone else" already has the answers to these questions. As a result, we democratize the classroom space—a key goal for decolonization, and one that also builds agency and empathy.

Opportunities for Independent Inquiry

There were two assignments in particular that allowed students to apply what they were learning about language and power to issues and topics that matter to them. The first was a media analysis paper (4 pages).a thesis-driven essay in which students applied a concept from the course (e.g. *code-switching, accent stereotypes, asymmetrical talk*) to some sort of media (film, television, music lyrics, etc.). Students workshopped topic proposals and thesis statements with each other, and with me in individual conferences. We worked together to outline their arguments and identify relevant evidence from the media artifact.

Here is a sampling of the range of topics students chose for this assignment:

- gendered language patterns in the recent *Barbie* film and the television show *Grey's Anatomy*
- linguistic biases in the Canadian sitcom *Kim's Convenience*
- raciolinguistic aspects of the Disney film *Aladdin*
- linguistic markers of identity in the music of Kendrick Lamar and Phoebe Bridgers
- use of code-switching among Black characters in the 2022 television show *Bel-Air,* a reboot of the popular 1990s television show, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*.

Many students expressed excitement at having the opportunity to link their course learning with media that they already engage with, and they had multiple opportunities to share their findings with classmates, in both large and small groups. Their application of course concepts became a manifestation of their agency: an opportunity to bring a critical lens to something familiar, highlighting what might be less obvious without the lens of CLA. This defamiliarization is often cited as a key feature of decolonizing pedagogies (e.g., Waghid & Meda, 2023).

The second assignment was a source-based research paper (5 pages) centered around a question students crafted, informed by their learning in the course. We spent time in class learning how to identify credible sources (both public and scholarly), and I worked with students to develop an annotated bibliography that we then used to shape an outline and draft of the paper. Some of the questions students examined included:

- How do sports commentators talk differently about female vs. male athletes?
- What role does language play in exacerbating ethnic tensions that lead to genocide?
- How do the conventions for academic writing in Spanish differ from those in English, and what cultural values are reflected in those conventions?

In these sample topics for both assignments, one can see students' critical consciousness about how language and power link to identity factors such as gender, race, and ethnicity. We also see student awareness of how language connects to issues of prejudice, conflict, and cross-cultural understanding. This awareness becomes agentive, as students are able to apply a critical lens in their analytical and research writing to explore topics that are personally meaningful and socially relevant.

Peer-to-Peer Communication

Although students engaged in extensive peer review and some low-stakes peer collaboration throughout the semester, the final project for the course took this a step further: Students were asked to communicate something they had learned in the course to an imagined student taking "Writing and Power" in the future. There were two options for them to choose from: a multimedia resource or a personal letter. They could work individually or in pairs. As with other assignments, we workshopped proposals early in the process, and there were opportunities for feedback from me and from their peers along the way.

Below is a sampling of the topics for multimedia projects:

- An infographic guide on how to use 4 types of punctuation we had reviewed in class
- A pamphlet on strategies for citing sources using APA style
- A Prezi on pros and cons of various Generative AI tools for academic writing
- A slideshow on strategies for organizing writing.

These projects demonstrated empathy and creativity in that students were thinking deeply about what content their peers might find useful, as well as what format might be most effective in conveying that content. The opportunity to compose in a medium other than an academic paper/essay for this project is also in alignment with the goal of decolonization, in that it expands the genres of writing considered "acceptable" in the academy (Canagarajah, 2024).

Writing in these nontraditional genres also gave students an opportunity to "practice what they preach"—namely, to demonstrate the writing skills and features they were conveying to their audience of peers. For example, Jade, a bilingual (Spanish-English), immigrant-background Latina student who created the slideshow on organizing writing, noted in her written reflection that she thought carefully about the organization of her slides. Her goal was "to create a clear and simple guide to creating organization in writing. I wanted to offer a clear idea of what it means to be organized in your writing, why it's important, and how this can be achieved."

Elizabeth and Zoe, both White, L1 speakers of English who were in the process of learning additional languages at Middlebury, created the pamphlet on citing sources. They chose to include samples of APA usage from their own writing, rather

than using generic examples they could have easily pulled from elsewhere. In their co-authored reflection, they wrote:

> "[W]e both agreed that an APA citing guide is something we both wished we had coming into college. We also wanted to make sure that we used writing that we did in this class--so the examples are all sections from our writing that we did in this class."

Students also channeled critical consciousness into these projects. DJ, a Black student who generally communicated in standardized English but occasionally used Black/African American English outside of school, partnered with David (pseudonym), a first-generation, immigrant-background Latino student, to create the Prezi on Generative AI tools for writing. The pair took care to ensure that their resource did not promote uncritical use of those tools, but rather, helped to deepen students' understanding of what each tool can and cannot do, in order to enhance their agency as writers. In his individual reflection on the project, DJ wrote:

> "I'm proud of the research I did to learn about these AI sources, as some were sources I had never used before. Also I'm proud of being able to display these tools as tools and not just another AI that can do stuff for you."

Thus, we see how students exerted their agency and empathy in both the content and the format of their projects, thinking carefully about what might be most useful and empowering for their peers.

Agency and Empathy in Peer Letters

Although I was impressed with the variety and utility of students' multimedia projects, I found the letters that were written to future students to be particularly impactful, and to be a powerful illustration of how a CLA approach promotes critical consciousness, agency, and empathy. In these letters, students were honest, thoughtful, and encouraging to their imagined audience of future students, and I could see the expressions of their agency both in the insights and advice they chose to share with their audience, as well as in the reflections they made on their own learning.

One student, Ruby, wrote a letter that was particularly agentive, as well as vulnerable, in places. Like Jade, Ruby is a Latina who grew up in a bilingual (Spanish-English) household, and had chosen to take "Writing and Power" because she didn't feel prepared for college-level writing. Ruby opened her letter by writing:

> Dear incoming freshmen, I want to start by saying that your first semester of college will be a **huge** transition, not only academically but you will also change. However, one of the hardest transitions for me was shifting from high school to college-level writing. When I came to Middlebury, I realized I struggled to change my writing skills from what was embedded in high school (not to say that some skills from high school weren't useful).

Ruby then discussed some of the ways she had grown as a writer, including in learning how to be more concise. She went on to discuss the importance of feedback in her development as a writer. She included the following anecdote, about the comments

she had received from me on her first assignment, which was a summary/response paper focused on the Boroditsky (2011) reading:

> When I received feedback from Professor Shapiro, I was shocked and honestly thought of dropping the class because I wasn't sure I could handle my writing being dissected (funny, considering I love *Greys Anatomy*, and that's basically all they do). However, after receiving feedback and rereading my paper, I realized I had a lot to work on . . . Even though my experience won't be the same as yours, it goes to show that you might struggle with something as "simple" as taking feedback. My advice would be to take the feedback for what it is, notes to improve your writing. It doesn't hurt to see what others think about your writing and to know whether or not you're getting your point across.

While I was a bit dismayed to realize that my initial feedback had been somewhat overwhelming for Ruby, I was incredibly proud that she had persisted and had arrived at a point where she saw feedback as crucial to her improvement as a writer. I also appreciated Ruby's tongue-in-cheek comment about the idea of "dissection" being a feature of her favorite television show, which she had focused on for her media analysis paper as well, coincidentally. In her reflection on the question *What are you proud of in what you've written/created?* that accompanied the submission of the final draft of her letter, Ruby wrote **"**I'm proud of being able to share my improvements in my writing thanks to this class."

Another student, Georgia, who grew up in a bilingual, English-German household, offered a range of writerly advice to

students, including some features and strategies to avoid, which she in fact parodied in the writing itself. This created a level of irony and humor that made her letter particularly enjoyable to read. Here are two excerpts:

> Another way to further the look and sound of academic writing, is to think about your word choice. Stop thesaurusing every other word. It sounds substandard. I swear. One robust word can elevate a sentence. Stop with the run on sentences. I get bored reading them like seriously you get lost following along and then I don't even know what the original point of the sentence was because there is no punctuation and it goes on for way too long.
> [...]
>
> Don't be one of those people that writes the same thing five times just paraphrased in their analysis. Don't do that if you don't have an argument, just make your thesis more arguable. Especially don't do that if you need to fill in more space when you just find more evidence. Conciseness gets your point across and keeps the reader attentive. It is always better to do the extra work of finding further evidence, than rewriting the same sentence four times. Do not paraphrase over and over again in your analysis. Just look for more evidence. It is important to be succinct.

Georgia's use of her invented word "thesaurusing," her sample run-on sentence in the first excerpt, and her excellent modeling of "writ[ing] the same thing five times just paraphrased" all help to increase both the engagement and the persuasiveness of the letter. She is able to be fairly direct in her

advice, because she softens the tone with this humorous modeling. In discussing what she was proud of in her project, Georgia referenced her agency as a writer and her empathy for readers: **"**I like the idea I had of adding a layer of humor. I just hope it was executed enough that the irony is clear." Her choice to resist some of the typical conventions for academic writing in her letter also indicated Georgia's critical consciousness about rhetorical choices available to her, and her agency in choosing to "break" some of the "rules."

A final example worth examining is by Marcelo (pseudonym), an international student from Colombia who had researched features of Spanish vs. English academic writing, and who chose to share his findings more colloquially in his peer letter, which he wrote especially for "Hispanic international students" to help them "avoid making the same mistakes I made." Marcelo centered much of his letter on the concepts of "reader-responsible" versus "writer-responsible" language—an important focus in scholarship on decolonizing academic writing (Canagarajah, 2024), as mentioned earlier. Here is an excerpt from Marcelo's writing:

> As a Spanish writer, teachers likely told you that readers have the responsibility to comprehend what the author tries to address because you, as a writer, have the conception that they will have good knowledge and background of the topic; however, if you were to write a college academic essay that way in the US, it would be so wrong and vague. Based on my research paper entitled "Writing in English and Spanish, something more than just switching words," you must write your essays using "writer-responsible" language rather than "reader-responsible in the US academic writing," since it is

> the writer's responsibility to provide maximum guidance to the reader. This guidance may include exaggerated guidance to the structure of the essay via the usage of transitions and direct and clear organization of the text.

Marcelo's reference to students' past educational experience shows his empathy for other international students, as well as his awareness of how writing conventions get perpetuated in the academy. Moreover, his use of the phrase "exaggerated guidance" highlights his recognition that the writer-responsible style of English academic writing is not necessarily "better" for communication and in fact, might come across to multilingual/L2 English writers as unnecessary or overwrought—again, a manifestation of his agency and critical consciousness about writing conventions.

Marcelo went on to offer other advice for Spanish speakers about academic writing in English. He mentioned some syntactic differences between the two languages and provided examples of how he might write a particular sentence in each language, to highlight those differences. Importantly, his goal was not to show one as an improvement over the other, but simply to raise readers' awareness of two possibilities for written expression.

Marcelo also reminded readers that there are similarities between academic writing in Spanish and in English, including the heavy use of Latin cognates in both. This offered a nuanced view of the relationship between the two languages, emphasizing shared features as well as differences —an alternative to the dichotomous thinking that is common in colonial ideology. In these rhetorical choices, we see Marcelo's critical consciousness about rhetorical practices across languages, and his agency in

demonstrating his ability to explain and employ both sets of practices within his own writing.

In some other students' reflections on their peer letters, they indicated various points of pride, often linked to their agency as writers and empathy for readers—both of which are of course connected to positive psychology (see Intro to this volume). Some examples include:

- "I am proud that I was able to be a little bit vulnerable in the third section about feedback."
- "I am proud of the advice I have given, the language I have used in this letter, and the grammatical structures I have used."
- "I am not used to writing in this format and with this level of formality, so it is definitely outside my comfort zone and I am proud of trying something new."
- "I am proud that I was able to reflect on all that I have done, and I feel through this I have made good takeaways that perhaps I didn't even realize until reflecting."

Potential Shortcomings

There are some ways in which I plan to revise this course so that it is even more closely aligned with the goals of critical consciousness, rhetorical agency, and empathy. The first is that I would like to collect more information at the beginning of the semester on students' past experiences with academic writing in English, as well as in other languages. This could be done via a survey or free-write. While we discussed these topics in class, having a written record would be useful both for me and for students to look back on at the end of the semester. Secondly, recalling what Ruby wrote in her peer letter, I want to reflect on

my own feedback practices to ensure that they are not too overwhelming for students—something I have been exploring in another, co-authored piece of writing (Shapiro & Perrault, forthcoming).

Another change I would like to make is to offer opportunities for students to challenge typical expectations of academic writing in at least one other assignment, so as to go further in the "decolonization" goal of the class. Some of the possibilities for doing this include:

- Inviting multimodal elements in assignments other than the final project. For example, students might incorporate a meme or other image that captures their overall take on Graff and Birkenstein's (2021) argument
- Asking students to write an abstract for their media analysis or research paper in a language, register, or style that is distinct from that of the paper itself (This is something some journals have modelled. See, for example, the 2022 special issue of the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* on the topic of "Social Justice in Applied Linguistics," which included abstracts in Spanish, African American Vernacular English, and other language varieties.)
- Facilitating a discussion or anonymous survey at the end of the semester about whether our course struck a balance between criticality and pragmatism, to glean whether I might want to adjust that balance.

A final change I am considering is to be more stringent about asking students to link their independent research to course themes. A few students chose topics that were only loosely

connected to Critical Language Awareness. Jade, for instance, focused on the phenomenon of "fatphobia" in the media. She included a few examples of fatphobic discourse, but most of the paper was focused on the issue itself rather than on language per se. Similarly, Eva, a second-generation Filipina-American, chose to investigate the impact of the "model minority myth" on Asian students. She was excited about this topic, and she demonstrated her empathy in wanting to understand a phenomenon that she and other students from similar ethnic backgrounds often experienced. However, there was very little about language in her paper. On the other hand, both of these students chose topics that were both timely and personally relevant, and forcing them to narrow down or change their focus might have hindered their agency and engagement. I will continue reflecting on how I might help students like these to bring in a bit more of the CLA perspective, while still allowing them to go in a direction that is motivating and rewarding for them.

Conclusion

What I have presented here is just one model of a course centered on Critical Language Awareness (CLA). It may well be that instructors in other contexts are unable to offer a course modeled closely on this one, but are still interested in infusing CLA into their writing instruction in order to cultivate critical consciousness, rhetorical agency, and empathy. For this reason, I would like to conclude with a few suggestions for creating "CLA moments" (Shapiro, 2022a) in writing/language classrooms, even if the course itself does not have a CLA as a primary focus:

1. Invite students to talk about the role of language in their day-to-day lives, including their academic lives. *What have you*

observed/experienced? When have you felt most empowered as a language user? When have you felt alienated or marginalized?

2. When talking about critical issues such as racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, etc., be sure to note how language is often a primary way that ideologies are perpetuated. For example, students might unpack a problematic statement from a public figure (or even an online exchange), asking: *What beliefs and narratives does this statement perpetuate? What perspective is missing? Who might be impacted by statements like these? Where else do we see these similar beliefs/narratives in our daily lives (e.g., news or social media)?* Students can also study examples of inclusive/humanizing language (e.g., Yin, 2026) that aims to perpetuate alternative ideologies, in keeping with the goals of positive psychology.
3. Encourage students to engage in "rhetorical reading" of course materials (or of texts they encounter in their daily lives). Some questions they might ask are: *What are some of the linguistic choices that this author/creator made that stand out to you? Would you say those choices are conventional or unconventional? What reaction do you have to those choices? Who (do you think) might have a different reaction?*
4. Ask students to identify and explain some of the linguistic choices they make in their own writing, highlighting their rationale for those choices. This can include word choice, sentence structure, and even punctuation! For example: *Why did I choose to end that last sentence with an exclamation point? How might different kinds of readers react to that choice? What are the potential benefits and risks of using*

exclamation points in academic writing? (For more on these types of "rhetorical grammar" conversations, see Salvatore [2021] and chapter five of Shapiro [2022a]. This is a concept that I would love to see taken up more widely within applied linguistics!).

The list above offers just some of the small but powerful ways we can increase students' critical consciousness, agency, and empathy as they continue to build their repertoire of academic literacy skills and to grow as language users. I hope this chapter has persuaded readers that engaging a CLA orientation to language—whether or not it is the central focus of the curriculum—can help bring our teaching of academic writing into greater alignment with the goals of decolonization and positive psychology.

Using my "Writing and Power" course as a case study, I have shown (I hope!) how we can demystify academic expectations, promote critical engagement with language, and enhance students' rhetorical agency and psychosocial well-being, using a CLA approach. In so doing, we help to prepare all students--including those from marginalized backgrounds—to navigate the complex norms and structures of the academy as it is today, while also raising their consciousness for how those norms and structures could be more just and inclusive in the future, In these ways, a CLA approach to writing instruction allows us to envision and enact social and linguistic justice both in educational settings and in society at large.

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CHAPTER 13

Recognizing the Unseen: An Analysis of Theory of Recognition and Positive Psychology in Decolonial ELT within Chilean Textbooks

Victor Birkner & Sebastián Mercado

Abstract

This study critically analyzes *High School English 2*, the state-mandated 10th-grade textbook in Chile, using interpretive content analysis informed by Recognition Theory, Positive Psychology, and decolonial pedagogy. The analysis examines representations of cultural diversity, Indigenous and migrant identities, and affective dimensions of learning such as empathy, hope, and resilience. Findings show that although the textbook gestures toward multicultural inclusion, it remains superficial: cultural references are tokenistic, empathy becomes mere open-mindedness, hope is framed through Western technological progress, and resilience is reduced to individual perseverance. These portrayals reproduce Eurocentric and neoliberal discourses while marginalizing Indigenous knowledge and collective well-being. By integrating the three frameworks, the study illustrates

how recognition, emotional development, and epistemic justice intersect in English teaching materials. It concludes with implications for teachers, developers, and policymakers, including community-based pedagogies, collaborative design with Indigenous and migrant groups, and evaluation criteria that prioritize recognition and inclusivity.

Keywords: recognition theory, positive psychology, decolonial ELT, Chilean textbooks, cultural representation, student well-being

Introduction

As neoliberalism expands globally, it has influenced nearly every aspect of society, including language and education. English is marketed as a passport to success or a key to opportunities, teaching students that it will help them secure well-paid jobs or travel abroad. Although learning English itself is not problematic, there are hidden interests and prevalent ideologies promoting the Global North's values through textbooks that often overlook local cultures (Smith, 2020). Despite this, insufficient action has been taken due to the numerous stakeholders involved in language education (Weninger & Kiss, 2015).

English Language Teaching (ELT) has faced criticism due to its ties to colonial legacies, sustaining linguistic imperialism and epistemic inequalities (Meighan & Veliz, 2026; Pennycook, 2017; Phillipson, 2017). Globally, English is commonly taught as a useful communication skill disconnected from the power structures it historically served, yet its colonial roots and role in perpetuating inequality remain hidden (Phillipson, 2017; Schreiber, 2019). English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching often promotes a standard variety of English, most often British

or American, monolingual ideals, and cultural norms of the Global North, marginalizing Indigenous and minority languages (Makoni & Pennycook, 2024).

In Chile, neoliberal policies established under Pinochet's dictatorship during the 1980s (Cabalin, 2012), only slightly adjusted through reforms for social justice, remain primarily market-driven, exacerbating social inequalities (Barahona, 2015; Barahona et al., 2024; Veliz et al., 2025, Zancajo, 2019). A key policy is the free distribution of textbooks for students in disadvantaged public and subsidized schools. The Ministry of Education purchases these resources mainly from UK or US publishers, which are then slightly adjusted to include some elements of local culture. However, content still primarily targets global proficiency standards, reinforcing colonial linguistic norms and white, monolingual Anglo-American cultural values, while ignoring local linguistic and cultural recognition (Barahona, 2015; Basabe, 2006; Gray, 2010).

Given this context, the present study critically examines High School English 2—the state-mandated textbook officially prescribed for 10th-grade students in Chile—focusing on how it engages with multicultural perspectives and supports learners' emotional well-being, particularly for historically marginalised groups.

Building on these critiques, this study applies Recognition Theory and Positive Psychology within a decolonial framework to examine not only ideological but also affective dimensions of ELT materials. Specifically, it analyzes how cultural recognition (visibility, respect, social esteem) and emotional well-being (empathy, hope, resilience) are represented in selected units and activities of High School English 2, contributing to the transformative ELT movement's goal of socially just and

emotionally supportive classrooms. The analysis focuses on units related to globalization, sustainability, and cultural identity, attending to reading passages, reflective tasks, and achievement narratives to make explicit how these constructs are operationalized in concrete discursive features.

To explore these concerns, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- **RQ1**: How do selected units of High School English 2 represent diverse cultural identities, and to what extent do they provide recognition in terms of visibility, respect, and social esteem?
- **RQ2**: In what ways do the textbook's activities and narratives foster, or fail to foster, students' emotional well-being, particularly empathy, hope, and resilience?

These questions respond to growing demands for ELT materials that promote inclusion, emotional support, and epistemic justice. The following section outlines the theoretical framework used to investigate these concerns.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three interrelated theoretical frameworks: Recognition Theory (Fraser, 2003; Honneth, 1995), Positive Psychology (Oxford, 2016; Seligman, 2011), and a decolonial perspective on ELT (Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Mignolo, 2011). Together, these frameworks provide conceptual tools for critically examining whether and how *High School English 2* represents diverse cultural identities and supports the emotional and sociocultural well-being of learners.

Recognition Theory

Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition emphasizes that identity and self-esteem are formed through social interactions in which individuals are seen, valued, and affirmed. He identifies three modes of recognition: love, respect, and social esteem, which provide affective and relational grounding for self-confidence, self-respect, and personal and social identity formation (Honneth, 1995; Liu, 2024; Rössler, 2007). Fraser (2003) extends this by arguing that recognition must be connected with redistribution. Symbolic affirmation alone is insufficient if systemic injustices continue to undermine dignity. In ELT, this perspective highlights the need to evaluate not only whether diverse identities are represented but also whether structural inequalities are addressed.

For analysis, we operationalize recognition as (a) visibility (who appears and how), (b) respect (rights/equality frames in institutional contexts), and (c) social esteem (valuation of culturally situated contributions). Following Honneth (1995), we also treat love/care as the affective substrate of recognition, traceable in supportive classroom prompts and affirming narratives addressed to minoritized learners.

Positive Psychology

Positive Psychology complements Recognition Theory by emphasizing emotional and psychological strengths that sustain well-being and personal growth. Seligman (2011) identifies three pillars: positive experiences, positive traits, and positive institutions. Oxford (2016) connects these ideas directly to language education, arguing that well-being must balance cognitive, affective, and social dimensions.

Positive Psychology has been critiqued for privileging individual traits over collective or structural conditions (Lake, 2016; MacIntyre, 2021). In contexts shaped by historical and ongoing colonial inequalities, framing resilience solely as individual perseverance risks reinforcing neoliberal ideals of self-reliance while obscuring systemic barriers. A decolonial reading extends Positive Psychology by framing hope, resilience, and empathy as collective capacities rooted in solidarity, community healing, and resistance to oppression. This aligns with Honneth's (1995) notion of love, understood as care and affirmation in social relationships, providing the affective grounding for recognition.

Decolonial ELT

A decolonial perspective challenges the colonial matrix of power embedded in ELT, which has historically privileged Anglo-centric norms, monolingual ideologies, and Euro-American cultural frameworks (Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Mignolo, 2011). Analytically, we read the textbook through epistemic justice (whose knowledge counts), representational politics (tokenism vs. substantive inclusion), and healing/repair: discourse that acknowledges harm and opens pathways for collective recovery, solidarity, and community care. In coding the textbook, this framework focuses on textual content and activities, analyzing whose knowledge is represented, whose voices are prioritized, and whose histories are acknowledged or silenced. Decolonial coding identifies patterns of epistemic injustice, highlights opportunities for cultural affirmation, and assesses whether exercises foster collective healing and solidarity. We mark decolonial moves when Indigenous or migrant epistemologies are treated as contemporary, agentive and legitimate—not folkloric

relics—and when learners are positioned as participants in community care, not mere observers.

Integration of Frameworks

Recognition Theory, Positive Psychology, and a decolonial ELT perspective offer complementary yet distinct analytical lenses. Recognition Theory foregrounds social and institutional conditions necessary for dignity and identity formation. Positive Psychology emphasizes emotional strengths, including hope, resilience, and empathy, which support engagement, motivation, and inclusion. Decolonial ELT situates these capacities within historical and structural contexts, foregrounding epistemic justice, collective healing, and cultural affirmation.

Integrating these frameworks allows for a layered analysis of High School English 2, focusing on textual content and classroom activities. Micro-level features such as exercises promoting recognition, empathy, and emotional well-being are coded alongside macro-level patterns such as the representation of marginalized cultures, structural inequities, and opportunities for collective healing.

Empirical Studies

A robust body of research has critically examined ELT textbooks for the ways they (re)produce dominant ideologies and shape learner subjectivities. Studies across diverse contexts converge around three recurrent themes: the promotion of neoliberal ideology, the marginalization of cultural diversity and epistemic justice, and the reinforcement of normative gender and sexual identities. While Latin American and Chilean research echoes these global concerns, the distinct sociohistorical context of the region demands closer attention.

Neoliberal Ideology in ELT Textbooks

Research demonstrates that ELT textbooks often function as ideological artefacts promoting neoliberal values such as entrepreneurship, individualism, and consumer rationality. Nizamani and Shah (2024), in their study of Pakistani textbooks, describe how materials operate as state apparatuses, constructing learners as self-governing and entrepreneurial subjects. Similarly, Shah et al. (2024), drawing on Foucauldian analysis, show how neoliberal discourses valorize consumerism and self-responsibility while sidelining collective empowerment. In a more recent extension, Shah and Shah (2025) highlight the anthropocentric logic of many textbooks, where even discourses on sustainability are framed in market-driven, human-centered terms.

In European contexts, Bori (2020) finds that best-selling ELT textbooks in the UK legitimize neoliberal governmentality by normalizing entrepreneurial self-governance and consumer responsibility. Ali and Hamid (2024), in Turkey, reveal that discourses linking English to employability are mediated by social class. Elite students resisted the textbook's framing of English as a pathway to precarious work, illustrating that local conditions shape how neoliberal messages are received.

These findings resonate with critiques in Chilean scholarship. Barahona (2015) observes that English education policies in Chile are heavily shaped by neoliberal rationalities, presenting English as human capital that enhances employability. Zancajo (2019) adds that education markets exacerbate exclusion, limiting equitable access. In this context, textbooks that foreground neoliberal narratives are not neutral but actively reinforce structural inequalities.

Cultural Representation and Epistemic Justice

A second body of research highlights the consistent marginalization of non-Western cultures in ELT materials. Mahbub et al. (2024), in a systematic review of 49 studies, demonstrate a widespread imbalance in cultural representation across Indonesian, Iranian, and Chinese textbooks, where Western perspectives dominate and intercultural communicative competence is stunted. Similarly, Shah (2023) finds that Pakistani textbooks construct national identity through religious and patriotic discourses while othering internal minorities and geopolitical adversaries. Yet he also notes contradictory discourses that allow space for learners to negotiate identity, pointing to the ambivalence within these materials.

Other studies underscore how Western culture is persistently centered. Keles and Yazan (2023), in a diachronic study of New Headway, show the enduring dominance of Anglo-American norms, with less than 10% of the content representing the Global South. Lee (2024) finds that textbooks for Hong Kong and Shanghai depict multiculturalism in superficial terms, focusing on cultural "products" while avoiding critical perspectives. Similarly, Purba (2023) shows how visuals in Indonesian textbooks reify native-speaker norms, undermining preparation for English as a lingua franca. Dündar and Sümbül (2024) highlight how intangible cultural heritage is commodified rather than used as a resource for critical intercultural learning.

Latin American scholarship has consistently linked such findings to colonial legacies. Gómez Rodríguez (2015), in Colombia, shows that textbooks exoticize culture by presenting it as static and folkloric, while Soto-Molina and Méndez (2020) demonstrate how multinational textbooks erase Indigenous

knowledge systems. Soto and Cevallos (2021) find a disconnect between Ecuadorian students' sociocultural realities and textbook content, while Viana et al. (2021) call for Global South epistemologies to inform materials. Núñez-Pardo (2022), through sociocritical analysis, identifies criteria for decolonial textbooks: ontological (resisting foreign ideologies), epistemological (challenging Western dominance), and power-related (resisting neoliberalism).

In Chile, Toledo-Sandoval (2020) shows that locally produced textbooks often reduce national symbols to tokenistic images, forcing teachers to supplement content informally. Veliz-Campos et al. (2024), using socio-semiotic analysis, demonstrate that Indigenous peoples are portrayed as relics of the past, erasing their contemporary presence. These findings are consistent with Viana et al.'s (2021) claim that superficial cultural inclusion destabilizes identity for Indigenous groups.

Gender and Sexuality in ELT Materials

Gender and sexuality also remain sites of exclusion. Ghajarieh et al. (2023) and Rasti (2025) show how Iranian textbooks uphold patriarchal norms: men dominate occupational roles and discursive agency, while women are marginalized or stereotyped. Rasti's (2025) systemic functional analysis illustrates how masculinity is equated with rationality and innovation.

In Taiwan, Brown (2025) identifies a heteronormative hidden curriculum. Out of 208 instances of sexuality representation, only two depicted same-sex couples, both isolated and marked as deviant. Rather than neutral omission, these textbooks actively reinforce heteronormativity, regulating which identities are deemed acceptable.

Regional Gaps

Although Latin American and Chilean scholarship has made critical contributions, important gaps remain. Few studies have examined ELT materials through the lens of affective education or psychological well-being. Research has typically emphasized ideological content (e.g., neoliberalism, colonialism, gender norms) without considering how textbooks foster or undermine learners' sense of recognition, hope, or resilience. The emotional and psychological dimensions of representation remain underexplored, particularly in Chile.

This study seeks to address that gap by combining Recognition Theory and Positive Psychology within a decolonial framework. While previous work has identified tokenistic multiculturalism and colonial residues in Chilean textbooks (Toledo-Sandoval, 2020; Veliz-Campos et al., 2024), the affective dimensions of recognition and emotional well-being have not been systematically examined. By foregrounding empathy, hope, and resilience as analytical categories, this study introduces an original contribution to Latin American research on ELT materials, showing how ideological and psychological dimensions intersect.

Methodology

This study critically analyzes High School English 2 (Zavala Iturbe, 2024) to examine how the textbook represents diverse cultural identities and fosters cultural recognition. It also explores Eurocentric narratives and power dynamics that shape students' emotional well-being and identity formation. The method employed is Interpretive Content Analysis (ICA), a qualitative approach that examines sociocultural meanings embedded in text.

Textbook Selection

High School English 2 is widely used at the 10th-grade level in Chilean public schools and is part of the national curriculum. It is designed for B1/B1+ proficiency and includes four thematic units: Globalization, Technology around us, Outstanding People, and Sustainable Development. Each unit integrates skills through CLIL-based activities, reflective projects, and authentic texts such as articles and blogs. Its widespread adoption makes it highly influential in shaping students' experiences of language, culture, and identity.

Data Collection

The primary data consist of the textbook's textual elements, including readings, exercises, glossaries, and written tasks. The analysis was supported by visuals retrieved from the textbook High School 2 (Zavala-Iturbe, 2024). The focus was placed on units addressing cultural recognition and personal development. Data were manually extracted and organized according to the study's theoretical framework.

Data Analysis

A mixed coding approach was employed, combining predefined categories from the theoretical frameworks with emergent themes. Recognition theory informed codes such as cultural awareness, respect, and social visibility (Fraser, 2003; Honneth, 1995). Positive Psychology informed categories such as resilience, empathy, and hope (Oxford, 2016; Seligman, 2011; Snyder et al., 2018). Decolonial pedagogy guided attention to epistemic justice, Indigenous knowledge, and colonial residues (Kumaravadivelu,

2016; Mignolo, 2011). The operationalization of these categories is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.
Operationalization of Theoretical Constructs in Coding

Theoretical construct	Definition	Operationalization in textbook analysis	Supporting sources
Love (Recognition)	Affirmation of worth through affective relations	Passages that validate students' cultural backgrounds or marginalized identities; teacher-facing or second-person supportive prompts; affirming narratives addressed to minoritized learners	Honneth (1995); Rössler (2007)
Respect (Recognition)	Equal treatment in institutional settings	Activities granting visibility to minority groups; rights/equality frames and explicit institutional acknowledgement in tasks or authorial stance.	Honneth (1995); Fraser (2003)
Social esteem	Valuation of contributions to society	Texts portraying cultural diversity as valuable; verbs/roles that attribute contribution and agency (beyond exotic/ornamental depictions)	Honneth (1995)
Empathy (Positive Psychology)	Understanding others' feelings	Prompts fostering intercultural dialogue and perspective-taking; links to concrete social realities and dialogic engagement (not generic "open-mindedness")	Seligman (2011); Oxford (2016)

Hope (Positive Psychology)	Agency and pathways toward goals	Passages offering visions of futures linked to collective action (beyond techno-optimism) and locally grounded solutions	Snyder et al. (2018)
Resilience (Positive Psychology)	Adaptation and recovery in adversity	Narratives of persistence, scaffolded by multisystem supports (family/community/school) with barriers explicitly named, not grit-only.	Lake (2016); Masten (2021)
Positive institutions (Positive Psychology)	Structures and practices that enable dignity, participation, and inclusion in ELT	Inclusive prompts/rubrics; multilingual validation; anti-deficit language; school/community supports made explicit in tasks or guidance.	Seligman (2011); Oxford (2016); Mercer & Gkonou (2020); MacIntyre (2021)
Epistemic justice (Decolonial ELT)	Recognition of diverse knowledge systems	Content affirming Indigenous epistemologies; treating Indigenous/migrant knowledge as contemporary and agentive (not folkloric/historical only)	Mignolo (2011); Kumaravadivelu (2016)
Healing / Repair (Decolonial ELT)	Acknowledgement of harm and pathways for collective recovery and solidarity	Reflection tasks that name historical/ongoing injustice; activities linking classroom work to community care, restorative practices, and solidarity-oriented action	Mignolo (2011); Kumaravadivelu (2016)

The coding process was collaborative. Both researchers engaged in iterative discussion and reflective memoing to ensure

analytical consistency. Data were organized into tables linking excerpts with codes, enabling comparison across units.

Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positionality

Visuals were included to support the readers' comprehension of the analysis. All images were retrieved from the textbook High School English 2 (Zavala-Iturbe, 2024). Both researchers identify with decolonial pedagogical commitments, and this shaped coding choices and interpretations. Reflexive journaling was used to document how positionality influenced analytical decisions.

Trustworthiness

To ensure rigor, findings were triangulated with prior studies on Chilean ELT materials (i.e., Barahona et al., 2024; Veliz-Campos et al., 2024). Coding was reviewed collaboratively to reduce bias, and reflective journaling documented the researchers' assumptions.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents a critical analysis of High School English 2, focusing on three overarching themes: superficial engagement with tokenistic multiculturalism, the representation of empathy, hope, and resilience through Positive Psychology, and the marginalization of Chilean and Indigenous identities. The central argument is that, despite its gestures toward inclusion and emotional development, the textbook largely reproduces Eurocentric narratives and neoliberal values, limiting its potential to foster recognition, well-being, and epistemic justice.

Tokenistic Multiculturalism

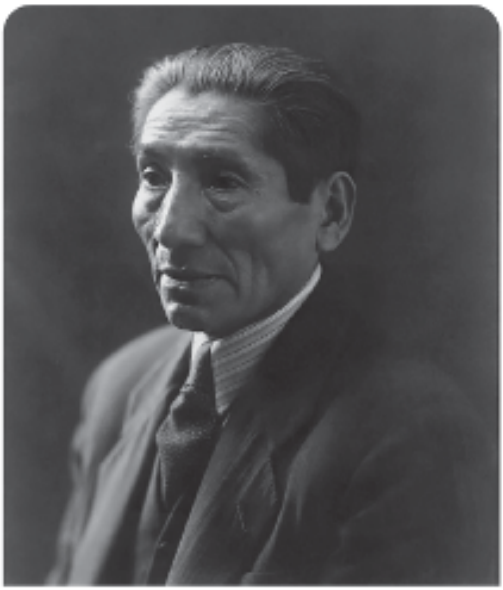
The textbook introduces cultural diversity across its four units, yet representations remain superficial. In Unit 1, a debate on globalization presents two contrasting views: "I think globalization has a negative impact on world population because it affects the identity of each country. Also, it can be dangerous because it causes global economic dependence" versus "Globalization helps us because it promotes global interactions. We can still have an identity while learning about other cultures" (Zavala Iturbe, 2024, p. 8). While this activity encourages students to consider multiple perspectives, the discussion is depoliticized and detached from local realities such as the impact of global trade on Chilean industries or Indigenous livelihoods. Recognition theory clarifies this limitation: acknowledgement of perspectives is not equivalent to genuine affirmation of dignity (Honneth, 1995).

Another example of tokenism appears in Unit 3's presentation of Freddy Mamani's architecture, described as "atypical, cultural but no less functional" (Zavala Iturbe, 2024, p. 74). This description exoticizes Aymara design, framing it as unusual rather than recognizing it as a legitimate expression of Indigenous modernity. As Gómez Rodríguez (2015) argues, such folklorization reduces culture to decorative value, obstructing critical engagement with its political and epistemic significance.

Similarly, the textbook briefly mentions Peruvian photographer Martín Chambi (see figure 1) as "one of the first Indigenous photographers in Latin America," noting that he welcomed "humble Quechua farmers" into his studio (Zavala Iturbe, 2024, p. 106). Yet it ignores his resistance to colonial visual narratives, reducing his work to an individual achievement. This

omission represents what Fraser (2003) warns against: recognition without redistribution. By overlooking structural oppression, the text symbolically affirms diversity while leaving systemic inequities intact.

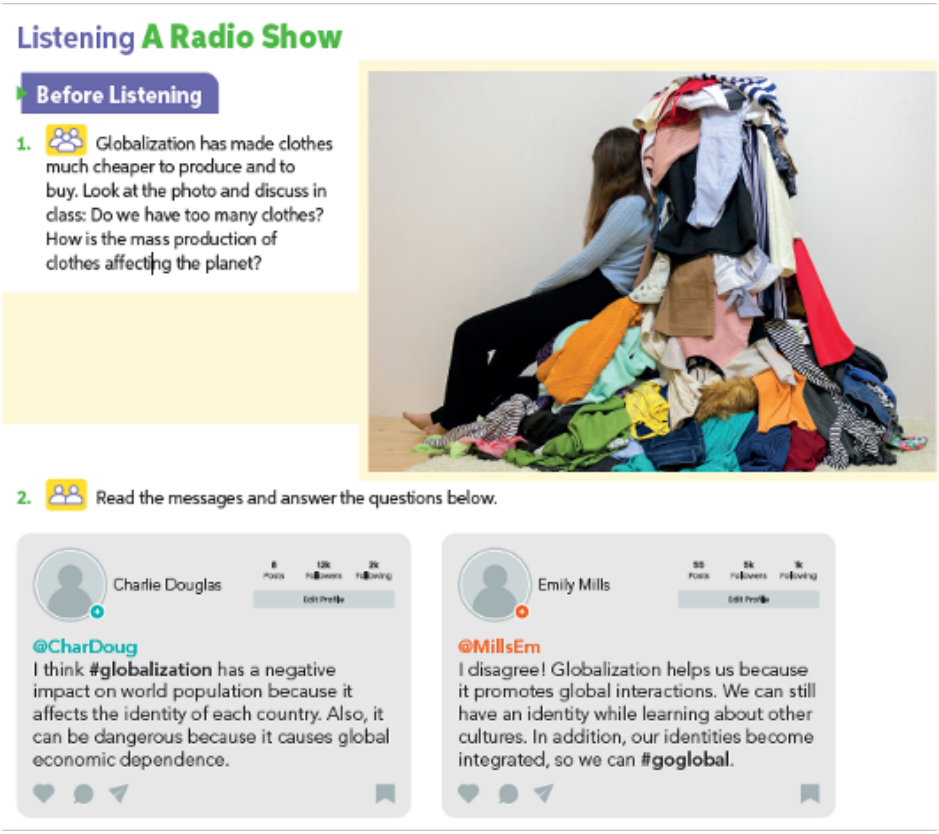
Figure 1. Self-portrait of Martín Chambi, 1956. Retrieved from High School English 2 (Zavala Iturbe, 2024).



These patterns are consistent with previous Chilean research. Veliz-Campos et al. (2024) show that Indigenous peoples in Chilean textbooks are often portrayed as historical relics, while Toledo-Sandoval (2020) demonstrates that cultural symbols are reduced to tokenism. The repetition of such practices in High School English 2 confirms that curricular reforms have yet to dismantle colonial representational patterns.

In sum, across Units 1 and 3 these excerpts make diversity *visible* yet frame it as decorative or "atypical," signaling *visibility* without *respect/esteem*. Read against Table 1 (visibility/respect/esteem), these appear as consistent patterns rather than isolated cases.

Figure 2. High School English 2. Unit 1: Globalization. Page 8. (Zavala Iturbe, 2024).



Positive Psychology: Empathy, Hope, and Resilience
Empathy
The textbook includes activities designed to foster empathy, such as reflective debates. In Unit 1 (see figure 2), students are asked to consider whether globalization helps or harms identity (Zavala Iturbe, 2024, p. 8). While this task promotes perspective-taking, it frames empathy as appreciating cultural difference rather than engaging critically with inequality. Mercer and MacIntyre (2014) argue that true empathy in language learning involves active engagement with social realities, not passive tolerance.

To move beyond individualism, the Unit 1 debate can be reframed as *relational empathy*: students co-construct questions with local stakeholders (e.g., workers, Indigenous communities) and produce dialogic outputs (interviews, position statements), activating *positive institutions* (inclusive prompts/rubrics) rather than relying on attitudes alone (see Table 1: empathy; positive institutions).

More explicit affective engagement appears in Unit 2, where students read "The Real-Life Story of the Boy Who Saved His Hometown," recounting William Kamkwamba's invention of a windmill to address famine (Zavala Iturbe, 2024, pp. 68–69). While inspiring, the narrative frames resilience and empathy around individual innovation, ignoring systemic poverty and collective struggle. By contrast, Nipapat and Wilang (2022) show that empathy is more effectively cultivated when linked to social justice themes, such as connecting emotional awareness to community issues.

Hope
Hope is most explicitly presented in Unit 1's text on climate change (see figure 3): "The impacts of climate change could be

mitigated if we limit global warming… Fortunately, we have resources and technologies available. We only need to act now!" (Zavala Iturbe, 2024, p. 21). This framing relies on technological optimism, reinforcing Western scientific authority while omitting Indigenous approaches to sustainability. MacIntyre (2021) warns that such framings limit hope to narrow epistemologies. Snyder et al. (2018) conceptualize hope as both agency and pathways. By reducing hope to individual or technological action, the textbook neglects collective pathways central to Chilean youth environmental activism.

Figure 3. Extract from a text in Unit 1 from High School English 2 on page 21. (Zavala Iturbe, 2024).



Resilience

Resilience is framed as individual grit rather than collective empowerment. In Unit 3, the narrative of Kamkwamba describes how "he was forced to stop attending school because his parents couldn't afford it, but he decided to keep educating himself by visiting the local library" (Zavala Iturbe, 2024, p. 69). The moral emphasizes perseverance without acknowledging systemic inequalities. Another task, "How to persevere while working on your goals," defines persistence as a "determined mindset that keeps you motivated… if you don't give up, you can accomplish your goals" (Zavala Iturbe, 2024, p. 61). Such messages reinforce

neoliberal meritocracy, suggesting success depends solely on individual willpower.

Masten's (2021) multisystem resilience perspective contrasts with this framing, emphasizing that resilience emerges from interconnected systems such as families, communities, and institutions. By isolating resilience as personal endurance, the textbook neglects social and institutional supports crucial to students facing inequality. Ginsburg and Jablow (2014) similarly stress that resilience should empower learners to challenge injustices rather than merely adapt to them. Similarly, "resilience" should be analyzed and taught as a *multisystem* capacity: tasks explicitly name barriers and require plans involving family/community/school supports, shifting from grit-only narratives to scaffolded adaptation (see Table 1: resilience).

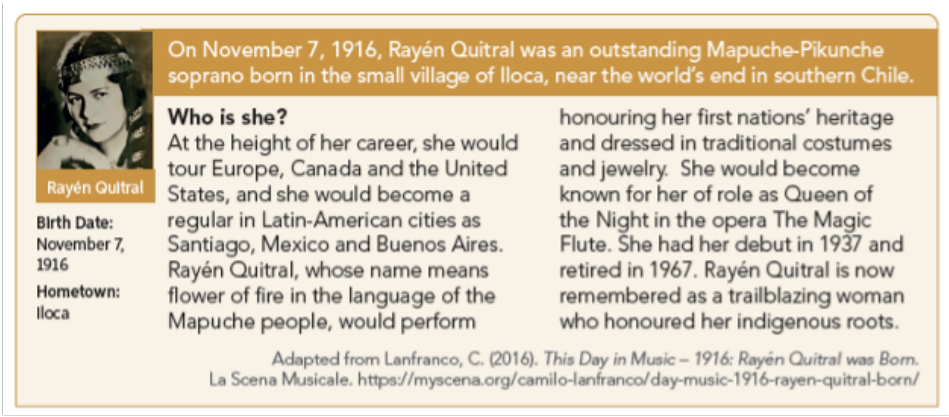
Read this way, *empathy/hope/resilience* are evidenced when pathways include community action and institutional supports; absent these, PP cues risk becoming thin (see Table 1: empathy, hope, resilience, positive institutions).

Marginalization of Chilean and Indigenous Identities

The textbook includes references to Chilean communities but often simplifies or depoliticizes them. In Unit 4, a passage on the Diaguita people notes: "The Tránsito River Valley is very fertile, and its inhabitants produce surpluses that they then sell at market. Today, however, the valley is being colonized by vineyards of grapes destined for export grown by large enterprises that have acquired estates in the Diaguita territorial zone" (Zavala Iturbe, 2024, p. 98). While the text acknowledges dispossession, it avoids naming corporations or analyzing power relations, presenting the issue as a neutral fact rather than a site of struggle.

Rayén Quitral, a Mapuche-Pikunche soprano (see figure 4), is described as "a trailblazing woman who honored her indigenous roots" (Zavala Iturbe, 2024, p. 71). Yet her death in poverty is omitted, masking the structural exclusion she faced in Chile. This omission aligns with Gray's (2010) critique that ELT textbooks often present success stories without acknowledging systemic barriers, attributing achievement to individual determination alone.

Figure 4. Photo of Rayén Quitral and short text about her life. Retrieved from High School English 2, page 71. (Zavala Iturbe, 2024).



These findings confirm broader patterns in Latin American research. Núñez-Pardo (2022) shows that Colombian textbooks similarly erase structural oppression, while Viana et al. (2021) highlight the destabilizing effect of superficial multiculturalism on identity formation. In Chile, Toledo-Sandoval (2020) and Veliz-Campos et al. (2024) demonstrate that reforms have not displaced colonial framings of Indigenous peoples as folkloric or marginal.

Across these themes, High School English 2 demonstrates a pattern of symbolic recognition without structural redistribution (Fraser, 2003). Empathy, hope, and resilience are presented but in ways that reinforce individualism and neoliberal meritocracy, undermining their transformative potential. Indigenous and Chilean identities are included but through depoliticized or tokenistic narratives, limiting genuine recognition and healing. These findings underscore the need for ELT materials that integrate affective education with critical pedagogy, ensuring that emotional well-being and cultural diversity are addressed as collective, systemic, and justice-orientated concerns.

Beyond diagnosing folklorization, we name the silenced epistemic alternatives—local/Indigenous knowledge as *contemporary* expertise—and center them through tasks co-authored with communities (e.g., bilingual testimonies, local case studies, evaluation criteria for *epistemic justice* and *healing/repair*), aligning findings with our recommendations (see Table 1: epistemic justice; healing/repair).

Limitations

This study analyzes a single, state-mandated ELT textbook and focuses on the textual components of the material; images and other multimodal resources were not examined due to copyright restrictions. We did not conduct classroom observations of activity enactment. In addition, the analysis prioritized reading passages and reflective tasks; listening, speaking, and writing components were not systematically examined. Because emotional well-being and recognition are relational processes, they may not be fully observable through textbook analysis alone and may manifest differently in practice. Implications for

findings. Given the narrow corpus (one textbook, text-only), our claims about tokenism/meritocracy and Positive Psychology cues should be read as discourse-focused inferences; multimodal images and classroom mediation could either mitigate or exacerbate these patterns. We therefore treat our estimates as conservative and open to triangulation with multimodal and classroom data. As a qualitative study, our aim is analytical transferability rather than statistical generalizability; readers should consider contextual fit when applying these insights.

We acknowledge that our analysis is conducted from a decolonial stance that seeks to challenge dominant epistemologies. Throughout the study, we employed reflexive journaling and collaborative coding discussions to surface and negotiate interpretive assumptions. To temper the influence of our decolonial commitments on interpretation, future work will incorporate member-checking with teachers/students and an external audit of the codebook, enhancing credibility and analytical balance.

Conclusion

The analysis of High School English 2 demonstrates that while the textbook introduces multicultural themes and affective elements such as empathy, hope, and resilience, its treatment of these issues remains superficial. Cultural references are often tokenistic, Indigenous knowledge is exoticized or depoliticized, and migrant voices are absent. Positive Psychology principles are present but reduced to individual dispositions rather than collective, systemic, and relational practices. Success stories, such as those of William Kamkwamba or Rayén Quitral, are framed through meritocratic narratives that obscure structural inequalities and attribute achievement solely to personal effort.

Recognition Theory clarifies why these omissions matter. For Honneth (1995), recognition through love, respect, and social esteem is essential for identity formation. Yet as Fraser (2003) argues, recognition without redistribution risks legitimizing inequality. The textbook symbolically affirms diversity while leaving systemic barriers invisible. Positive Psychology could provide tools for fostering learner well-being, but its narrow framing is misaligned with decolonial concerns. Hope is reduced to technological optimism, neglecting community-driven pathways (Snyder et al., 2018). Resilience is portrayed as endurance rather than collective empowerment, contradicting Masten's (2021) multisystem approach. Empathy is equated with open-mindedness, rather than the socially engaged empathy described by Oxford (2016) and Mercer and MacIntyre (2014). In direct relation to the research questions, Recognition Theory and decolonial ELT helped answer RQ1 by showing that visibility frequently lacked respect and esteem, that is, recognition without redistribution, while naming the epistemic alternatives that remain marginalized; Positive Psychology, read through positive institutions, helped answer RQ2 by clarifying that empathy, hope, and resilience become educationally meaningful only when coupled with community action and multisystem supports.

Taken together, these findings show that High School English 2 reproduces neoliberal and Eurocentric narratives while missing the opportunity to foster cultural recognition and emotional well-being in transformative ways. A decolonial reorientation of ELT materials would require integrating Indigenous epistemologies, centering migrant voices, and framing affective education as collective and justice-orientated rather than individualistic. A series of suggestions will be

presented in the Recommendations section to conclude the chapter.

Recommendations

The findings suggest several practical steps for teachers, textbook developers, and policymakers.

For teachers, adopting restorative and decolonial pedagogies can help bridge the gap between textbook content and learners' realities. This involves reframing empathy as socially engaged practice rather than passive tolerance. Activities such as community-based projects, debates linked to local social struggles, and collaborative storytelling can foster deeper recognition of marginalized voices. Hope should be cultivated by connecting classroom themes to collective action, for example, through environmental or social justice initiatives rooted in local contexts. In line with Snyder et al.'s (2018) model of hope as pathways and agency, teachers can design tasks that build both individual reflection and shared action. Resilience should be presented not as individual grit but as collective empowerment, consistent with Masten's (2021) multisystem framework. Classroom practices can emphasize peer collaboration, solidarity, and recognition of systemic barriers.

For textbook developers, we encourage local publishers, developers and government institutions to create their own material that is culturally relevant for the people in their countries. Inclusion must move beyond symbolic and general representation. Indigenous and migrant communities should be involved as consultants, co-authors, or reviewers to ensure epistemic justice. Content should highlight Indigenous and local knowledge not as folkloric or decorative, but as legitimate and contemporary epistemologies. Criteria for evaluating affective

content should reflect Oxford's (2016) view that well-being in language learning requires balancing cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. Fraser's (2003) insight that recognition must be linked to redistribution can be operationalized by including discussions of systemic inequities, ensuring that recognition is not merely symbolic but transformative.

For policymakers, textbook evaluation should include criteria for cultural representation and affective well-being alongside linguistic accuracy. Current approval systems privilege global benchmarks but neglect justice-orientated dimensions of learning. Policies should require publishers to demonstrate how materials address recognition, inclusion, and emotional development in ways that support diverse learners in Chilean classrooms.

By adopting these recommendations, Chilean ELT can move toward practices that validate marginalized identities, promote social justice, and foster collective well-being. Such changes would not only enrich language learning but also position education as a site for recognition, solidarity, and transformation.

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CHAPTER 14

Initial Teacher Education in English Language Teaching in Chile: Cultivating a Transformative and Sustainable Teaching and Learning Process

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Abstract

Educational research from the Global North frequently characterizes Latin American teacher education as inadequate, dismissing the pedagogical richness developed through decades of education movements and context-responsive practice. Following those traditions, this chapter proposes a transformative model for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Chile, integrating decolonial, intercultural, and inclusive perspectives and, at the same time, giving a central role to teacher well-being and emotional resilience. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory and positive psychology frameworks, we challenge Western-centric approaches that reproduce colonial hierarchies and marginalize teachers' agency. The model addresses critical issues including high attrition rates, emotional burnout, and linguistic

imperialism through six core components. Implementation examples from four transformed undergraduate courses demonstrate how repositioning English enables resistance to colonial impositions while maintaining pedagogical effectiveness. This approach offers broader relevance for Global South contexts seeking culturally responsive teacher education that prioritizes social transformation alongside professional development.

Keywords: teacher well-being, Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), positive psychology, Chilean ELT

Introduction

Constanza stares at her reflection in the bathroom mirror of her practicum school in Ñuñoa, Chile, fighting back tears. Her supervising teacher has just told her that her English pronunciation and grammar were not "good enough" for the classroom, and that perhaps she should reconsider her career choice. Coming from a poor socioeconomic background and being first generation university student, Constanza had dreamed of becoming an English teacher to create opportunities for students like herself. Instead, she finds herself questioning whether someone like her could ever be a "real" English teacher. Costanza's experience reflects a critical challenge facing Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in English Language Teaching across Chile: the persistent reproduction of colonial hierarchies and the systematic neglect of teacher well-being that drives promising educators away from the profession. Despite decades of policy initiatives aimed at improving English education, Chile continues to struggle with teacher retention, emotional burnout, and

inequitable outcomes that mirror broader social stratification patterns.

As Chilean teacher educators working within the public education system, educating and being educated by teacher trainers, we bring specific perspectives shaped by our experiences navigating the tensions between global expectations and local realities. Our collaboration emerged from shared concerns about the sustainability of current ITE models and a commitment to developing alternatives that honor both the professional aspirations of future teachers and the cultural diversity of Chilean society. We write from a position of solidarity with teachers like Constanza, recognizing that transforming teacher education requires addressing both systemic inequities and individual well-being.

For this, we propose a transformative approach to ITE in ELT that positions teacher well-being, emotional resilience, and a decolonial practice. This is portrayed in a New Model for ITE, an in-process proposal, together with initial examples of its implementation within the undergraduate English Teacher program where we have been developing our practice. Drawing primarily on Self-Determination Theory and emotional resilience frameworks, we argue for a model that prepares teachers not just as technical practitioners, but as agents of social transformation capable of creating inclusive, sustainable learning environments.

The Colonial Legacy in ELT in Chile

The relationship between modernity and the colonial legacy in ELT in Chile, and the rest of the territories of our continent of the South, is complex and multifaceted. It has historical, social, and political dimensions that have profoundly shaped language education in our country The Spanish colonization of Chile and

Latin America established a linguistic imperialism that has persisted until today. In this sense, Indigenous languages (and knowledges) such as Mapudungun, Quechua, Aymara and a few others were systematically suppressed as Spanish became the dominant language of government, education, and culture (Barahona, 2016). Even if English was introduced to the country during the 19th century through migration and later implemented through university programs (Abrahams & Farías, 2017), it was not until the 90's that its pervasiveness was completed in the hands of government policies. This historical context is crucial for understanding the contemporary dynamics of language teaching in Chile, where English is often positioned as a language of social and economic power.

Despite extensive research on English language education in Chile, most studies fail to acknowledge how socioeconomic inequities are reproduced within the educational system and their impact on English teaching outcomes (Veliz et al., 2025; Riquelme-Sanderson & Torrico-Ávila, 2023). Romero (2022) found that while the research community recognizes poor standardized test results as a major issue, there is insufficient examination of how Chile's socioeconomic gaps contribute to these educational failures, reflecting a broader unwillingness within the local research community to address these critical aspects of EFL education.

The historical development of ELT in Chile is fundamentally shaped by colonial legacies and power structures that continue to influence contemporary educational practices. Phillipson's (1992) concept of linguistic imperialism provides a framework for understanding how English has been promoted at the expense of local languages and cultures, reinforcing socioeconomic inequalities within Chilean society. The

institutionalization of English reflects broader patterns of linguistic hierarchization, where English-speaking immigrants and commercial interests established the language as a marker of civilization and modernity (Abrahams & Farías, 2017; Barahona, 2017; Vera, 1942). This historical trajectory reveals how English became embedded in Chilean educational institutions as a symbol of social distinction and global connectivity (Abrahams & Farías, 2017). In this sense, English holds significant social and economic value in Chile, perceived as "opening doors" across all socioeconomic groups (Barahona et al., 2025; Glas, 2008; Matear, 2008; Veliz et al., 2025). However, access to quality English education remains highly unequal, with stark disparities between public and private schools (Torrico-Ávila et al., 2021). National policies such as "English Opens Doors," launched in 2003, have aimed to democratize access by making English compulsory from the fifth grade (MINEDUC, 2022). This program positions English as essential for social mobility and economic development, reflecting a neoliberal framework that emphasizes the commodification of language education and ties English proficiency to global economic competitiveness (Riquelme-Sanderson & Torrico-Ávila, 2023).

Despite these democratizing efforts, implementation challenges persist, including insufficient qualified teachers and limited resources, particularly in schools serving lower-income communities (Barahona, 2016). The neoliberal framework perpetuates vicious cycle in which individuals with access to quality English education, commonly from wealthy backgrounds, obtain significant advantages over their peers (Riquelme-Sanderson & Torrico-Ávila, 2023). Consequently, English proficiency continues to serve as a marker of social distinction, with students from privileged backgrounds more likely to access

high-quality instruction (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013; Byrd, 2013). This perpetuates a constant contradiction in which English functions simultaneously as a gateway to opportunity and a mechanism for reproducing social stratification.

The focus on English often comes at the cost of Indigenous languages and local cultural identities, even when policies exist to increase the relevance of Indigenous languages and culture (Quintriqueo et al., 2022). These policies have been resisted publicly because of their lack of social mobility or economic development elements (Díaz, 2025). When language proficiency becomes synonymous with social status and economic opportunity, English helps to deepen inequalities. While some individuals view the teaching of English in the Chilean context as colonial complicity (Baum, 2022), they also recognize that these challenges can be addressed. Although there is no widespread call for decolonizing ELT practices in Chile, there are some interesting attempts and proposals (Riquelme-Sanderson & Torrico-Ávila, 2023). Decolonization in this context means challenging existing power structures within education that favor epistemologies from the Global North over local knowledge, addressing the fundamental ways in which English language education continues to reproduce historical patterns of inequality and cultural domination

These Colonial legacies manifest, for example, in Chilean ELT classrooms through the systematic privileging of "native speaker" pronunciation over local English varieties, creating what Constanza experienced in her practicum. Research reveals that Chilean teachers and students alike have internalized pronunciation hierarchies, positioning British Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American (GA) accents as the gold standard, while dismissing Chilean-accented English as deficient

(Villablanca, 2022). In practice, this means teachers create and an imagined native ideal, which is expressed in an inadequate perception of accents (Poblete et.al, 2018), finally dismissing the importance of intelligibility over perfect pronunciation. These misconceptions often occur even when Chilean pronunciation patterns are perfectly intelligible and systematically rule-governed. Students like Constanza face constant microaggressions about their "non-standard" pronunciation, with supervising teachers explicitly stating that their Chilean accent makes them unsuitable for English teaching, despite research showing no correlation between foreign accents and reduced comprehension when communication remains clear (Véliz, 2011).

The connection between modernity and colonial legacies in ELT in Chile reveals deep-rooted issues related to linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992; Veliz & Chen, 2024), socio-economic inequality (Epperson, 2024; Kormos, & Kiddle, 2013), and cultural marginalization (Sanchez, 2025; Véliz-Campos, 2024). Understanding this historical context is essential for developing an educational framework that promotes inclusivity and respects linguistic diversity. As Chile navigates its path toward a more equitable educational system, embracing decolonial approaches will be crucial for cultivating a transformative teaching and learning process that honors all voices within its society. There is an opportunity for the country to move toward a more just educational system that empowers all learners to thrive within their cultural contexts while engaging with global discourses.

Decolonial and Intercultural Perspectives in ELT

In the context of epistemological struggles, there is a growing recognition of the need to reconsider the teaching and learning of

English (Abarzua & Cabezas, 2024; Baum, 2022). This reconsideration moves beyond viewing English merely as a foreign language for market purposes, but positioning it instead as an intercultural tool that facilitates encounters between individuals and peoples (Escobar, 2003), through which they can share their culture, stories and much more. This shift in perspective is crucial as it acknowledges the importance of diverse knowledge systems, particularly those originating from outside the Global North. In this sense, this perspective aims to establish a world where dialog among various frameworks of thought are present, including but not limited to European legacies; and, at same time, as teacher educators we intend to place significant emphasis on rescuing and elevating popular and Indigenous knowledge as equal and equivalent to other forms of knowledge. The approach we take represents a fundamental departure from traditional narratives, which often fail to integrate the histories of subaltern communities into their frameworks. Instead, we propose a different way of thinking that challenges intra-modern perspectives, going beyond implying just the universalization and radicalization of modernity (Escobar, 2003).

Overcoming the knowledge hierarchies imposed by the Global North requires adopting a clear geographical, political, and theoretical stance rooted in the lived experiences of subjects, communities, and subaltern nations experiencing colonial domination (Walsh, 2007). This perspective challenges traditional Western accounts of modernity that credit Enlightenment thought, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution as its foundations (Escobar, 2003). A more comprehensive understanding recognizes that modernity was built upon the genocide and domination of Indigenous peoples in

the Americas and African slavery. This realization confirms that coloniality and modernity are inseparable—there is no modernity without coloniality.

After 1492, slavery and colonization acquired a systemic, planetary character they had not previously held. Europe and the Global North installed themselves in a privileged epistemological space from which they have subordinated knowledges and cultures emerging from other geographies (Quijano, 2000). Reclaiming Latin American thought thus becomes an urgent task, a thought that springs from our radical heterogeneity and our "ch'ixi" nature (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010), one that accepts the complexity of mestizaje while never losing sight of the fact that this history was forged through blood, suffering, and extermination of Southern peoples. A history of pain and subjugation that has not ended.

To decolonize English teaching, first, we require to have a clear understanding of coloniality as the persistent logic of domination that outlives formal colonialism. As Posada-Ortiz and Castañeda-Peña (2021) argue, this coloniality represents "a matrix of knowledge that privileges the hierarchy of knowledge, its organization, its legitimacy, and its circulation within the 'global order'" (p. 183). In this way, we understand that this matrix is extended directly to language education through imported methodologies, terminologies, and theoretical frameworks predominantly derived from the Global North. In the same line, Sarmiento and Perales (2022) further highlights that English has become "the hegemonic language par excellence, transmitting more than words but a cultural imprint that codifies existence, by promoting globalization, capitalism, as well as ways of living and expressing oneself that do not reflect the reality of the regional context" (p. 455). This cultural imposition operates

alongside linguistic imperialism to shape subjectivities and reinforce unequal power relations.

Decolonizing English teaching involves moving beyond superficial forms of interculturality. Baum (2022) cautions that merely declaring oneself "intercultural" can become "the greatest and worst of traps, because it initiates a stage of emotive and inclusive rhetoric that conceals practices of subjection, suppression, and subalternization" (p. 22). This particular form of interculturality serves as a convenient solution that ensures continued of the Global North hegemony through paternalism and guardianship. Instead, decolonizing English teaching requires embracing what Walsh (2009) calls "critical interculturality," which acknowledges colonial differences and structural inequalities rather than reducing them to cultural differences. This approach recognizes the historical wounds of colonization and works toward healing through restitution of ancestral ways of living, knowledges, and communal practices.

If we wish to intervene significantly in English teaching, we need to involve ourselves in reconceptualizing English not as a foreign, second, or international language, but as what Arteaga (1994) terms a "lengua otra" (an other tongue). In this way, Baum (2022) asserts this concept as shifts the focus from whether specific linguistic practices are normative to questioning who holds the power to define and regulate language norms. By positioning English as "an other tongue," teachers can create spaces for linguistic insurgency and resistance to colonial impositions while still teaching the language effectively. Then, this approach, in what Mignolo (2010) calls "lenguajeo" or "bilenguajeo fronterizo" (border bilanguaging), allows speakers to express themselves in educational languages while also employing languages of disobedience (Baum, 2022).

For student teachers like Constanza, embracing these decolonial and intercultural approaches means transforming spaces where her Chilean accent and working-class background were positioned as deficits into pedagogical contexts that recognize her multilingual repertoire and cultural knowledge as valuable educational resources. By reconceptualizing English as "lengua otra" rather than a colonial imposition, teacher education programs can prepare future educators to resist the linguistic hierarchies that sought to silence Constanza's voice, instead empowering them to create classrooms where all students' cultural and linguistic identities are centered as strengths rather than obstacles to overcome.

The Importance of Self-Determination Theory in ITE

Incorporating a decolonial lens into English teacher education compels us to critically examine the underlying assumptions and power dynamics that shape pedagogical practices. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), with its focus on autonomy, competence, and relatedness, offers a transformative framework for reimagining initial teacher education beyond Eurocentric paradigms. By centering these psychological needs, we challenge the legacy of colonial education models that often prioritize conformity, hierarchy, and external control. Instead, SDT supports the development of teachers' autonomy and agency to act according to their own values, adapt their practice to diverse sociocultural realities, and build meaningful relationships within their communities.

The approach we are proposing for comprehensive teacher education is in part grounded in SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), which identifies three basic psychological needs that individuals inherently seek to satisfy: *autonomy, competence*, and

relatedness. The mentioned needs have been extensively studied in work environments (Deci et al., 1989; Deci et al., 2017; Forner et al., 2020; Van den Broeck et al., 2016) and are particularly relevant in our field, teacher training (Burgueño et al., 2022; Haukås et al., 2023; Ramos et al., 2025; Spittle et al., 2009), given the numerous challenges that impact teachers' motivation and well-being alike. We believe this theoretical framework serves as a key tool in a context that is constantly requiring a redefinition of the teaching profession and strengthening its own identity from a transformative perspective, which is aligned with the emerging ideas coming from the Global South. Prioritizing both teachers' well-being and mental health might contribute to the creation of more sustainable and human-centered educational systems (Collie et al., 2012; Hascher & Waber, 2021; Klassen & Tze, 2014).

Among these basic psychological needs, autonomy plays a central role. Autonomy, then, is defined as the ability to act according to a person´s beliefs and criteria, making decisions aligned with one's values (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In teacher education, autonomy enables future teachers to develop professional judgment and adapt to diverse socio-educational contexts (Collie et al., 2019). In this sense, this ability optimizes teaching practices and empowers teachers to foster autonomy among their own students, promoting participatory and meaningful learning environments (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Furthermore, the development of autonomy directly influences teachers' general well-being and job satisfaction, establishing this as an essential component of their professional, and even personal growth (Collie et al., 2016; Kang & Yoo, 2019; Meng, 2020; Ramos et al., 2025).

Competence is another crucial need in teaching, which can be understood as the ability to feel effective in interactions with the environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This effectiveness in interactions entails teachers being able to apply their knowledge and skills effectively, facing the challenges of the classroom successfully (Deci et al., 1991). Doménech-Betoret et al. (2015) argue that higher levels of competence might be associated with increased commitment to teaching and, in turn, to a significant reduction in burnout. Therefore, taking this stance, we believe it is essential to include constructive feedback processes and provide experiences of success during initial training, strengthening teachers' confidence and preparedness to tackle the inherent challenges of their profession. Moreover, we need to understand that the need for relatedness refers to the establishment of meaningful relationships that allow teachers to feel part of a cohesive group (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This need, in education, appears as key to foster collaborative spaces and building a strong professional identity; in this arena, recent studies highlight the relationship between relatedness and higher levels of intrinsic motivation (Gorges et al., 2022), occupational well-being (Abdulaziz Alfatez et al., 2021; Clément et al., 2020; Collie et al., 2016), and job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2016). Promoting educational spaces that meet this need is crucial for strengthening trust and collaboration among educational stakeholders, giving greater meaning to the teaching-learning process (Clément et al., 2020; Maas et al., 2020).

We propose that the fulfillment of these three basic psychological needs, at the end, is closely linked to teacher well-being, which, in turn, can be understood from two main dimensions. We also understand that Constanza's tears in that bathroom mirror reflect not personal inadequacy but a systemic

failure to provide the emotional and relational support necessary to navigate teaching, as we recognize teaching as fundamentally emotional and social work. SDT offers a pathway forward, one where future teachers like Constanza herself would experience autonomy to value their own linguistic resources and relatedness within supportive communities, honoring their cultural identities as pedagogical assets.

Insights from Positive Psychology

Positive Psychology provides a theoretical framework centered on the study of human strengths and their impact on well-being and personal fulfillment (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In the educational field, this approach is particularly relevant as it enables the transformation of school environments into spaces that not only develop technical skills but also promote human flourishing (Shankland & Rosset, 2017). Despite the growing body of evidence supporting the relevance of well-being in education, most educational systems worldwide have prioritized the development of technical skills, often neglecting the socio-emotional dimensions of learning (Zembylas, 2024). However, integrating Positive Psychology into initial teacher education offers fundamental tools to strengthen personal growth and professional satisfaction among educators (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Waters et al., 2022). This approach not only fosters a more resilient teacher identity but also has the potential to positively impact teacher retention rates and overall well-being (Collie et al., 2016).

Teacher well-being is conceptualized as a combination of hedonic dimensions, associated with the presence of positive emotions and stress reduction, and eudaimonic dimensions, which encompass a sense of purpose and intrinsic motivation

(Ryan & Deci, 2000). Research has shown that teachers experiencing higher levels of well-being demonstrate greater commitment to their profession and achieve better outcomes in their teaching practices, ultimately fostering a more effective learning environment (Collie et al., 2016; Ramos et al, 2025). Moreover, teacher well-being has a direct impact on the broader educational community, generating a multiplier effect that positively influences student motivation, academic performance, and mental health (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Renshaw et al., 2015). Consequently, creating school environments that actively promote teacher well-being constitutes a key strategy for enhancing educational quality and strengthening resilience across the school community.

From this same perspective, the identification and cultivation of personal strengths, such as resilience, empathy, and self-determination, are essential for achieving sustained well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2011). In initial teacher education, this implies implementing strategies that help future educators recognize and develop their strengths, enabling them to apply these in the socio-educational contexts where they will work (Fredrickson, 2001; Niemiec, 2014). Additionally, fostering a culture of self-recognition and recognition of others (Honneth, 1996) within educational institutions is crucial for strengthening teachers' professional identity. Similarly, increasing the value placed on the teaching profession within schools enhances teacher well-being and improves organizational commitment and school climate, ultimately positively impacting the quality of teaching and learning (Kern et al., 2014; White & Kern, 2018).

Positive Psychology can be a powerful tool for transforming the learning experience of trainee teachers through

the design of educational programs that integrate its key principles (Seligman, 2011; White & Kern, 2018). Strategies such as fostering meaningful interpersonal relationships, providing constructive feedback, and establishing achievable goals could be effective in creating learning environments that not only develop pedagogical competencies but also promote professional autonomy and strengthen ties with the educational community (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Niemiec, 2014).

From a motivational perspective, the development of these strategies could directly impact teachers' sense of belonging and purpose (see growth mindset theory, Dweck, 2006) and the reinforcement of professional identity (Kern et al., 2014). These strategies may serve as precursors to higher levels of well-being and job satisfaction among teachers, helping to reduce emotional exhaustion and teacher burnout (Collie et al., 2016; Renshaw et al., 2015). Likewise, broadening and consolidating positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) could facilitate teacher resilience and the development of more effective educational practices, which is essential for empowering teachers, equipping them with the support and motivation necessary to pursue a sustainable and fulfilling career (Waters et al., 2022).

By incorporating Positive Psychology principles into initial teacher education, educational programs can adopt an innovative approach that places teacher well-being at the core of the training process, recognizing it as the driving force for achieving sustainable educational impact (Seligman et al., 2009; Waters, 2022). This prioritization of teachers' personal and professional development will enable the creation of more resilient, collaborative educational communities focused on human flourishing (Day & Gu, 2014). In this way, Constanza would have reinterpreted her moment of vulnerability in that bathroom

mirror as an opportunity to identify and cultivate her inherent strengths—her empathy for marginalized students, her resilience as a first-generation university student, and her deep sense of purpose in creating opportunities for others like herself.

Proposing a New Model for ITE in ELT

We propose a new, contextually grounded model for ITE in ELT for our Chilean context. This model, that is portrayed in Figure 1, integrates decolonial, intercultural, and inclusive perspectives, centering teacher well-being, emotional resilience, and the recognition of diverse knowledges and identities.

This proposal is rooted in a decolonial approach, challenging the dominance of imported methodologies and knowledge hierarchies from the Global North (Mignolo, 2007; Phillipson, 1992). English is not a tool for market-driven mobility alone but a means for intercultural dialogue and mutual enrichment (Baum, 2022; Escobar, 2003). Teacher education programs must critically engage with Chile's, and all Global South's, colonial history, value Indigenous and local knowledge systems, fostering critical consciousness among pre-service teachers (Mejía, 2013; Walsh, 2007). Then, inspired by Levinas (1969), we suggest centering the ethical responsibility of teachers on their students, emphasizing authentic relationships, empathy, and the visibilization of marginalized voices. This approach must reframe teaching as a dialogic and transformative encounter, moving beyond curriculum-driven instruction toward a pedagogy that values the lived experiences and potential of all learners (Levinas, 1969; Torres, 2016).

Figure 1. *Structural Components of the Model*



The proposal we would like to implement must adopt SDT to address the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in teacher development (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). In this way, it is essential for fostering intrinsic motivation, professional commitment, and well-being among future teachers (Burgueño et al., 2022; Collie et al., 2016). Emotional resilience, in a way, is foregrounded as a core component, recognizing the need for teachers to navigate adversity and manage stress, building supportive professional communities (Gu & Day, 2007; Zembylas, 2024). Additionally, we would like to incorporate explicit training in empathy, communication, and collaborative skills, preparing teachers to create inclusive, prosocial learning environments (Jordan, 2006; Hargreaves, 2000). Finally, from Positive Psychology, we take

need for the cultivation of strengths, positive emotions, and a sense of purpose, promoting both hedonic (pleasure, stress reduction) and eudaimonic (meaning, self-actualization) dimensions of well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Waters et al., 2022). Then, we position teachers' well-being as central to educational quality and student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

The model proposed marks a paradigmatic shift in ITE for ELT in Chile, by integrating decolonial, intercultural, and inclusive perspectives with a focus on teacher well-being, emotional resilience, and relational capacities. We seek to cultivate transformative and sustainable teaching practices. For this we challenge traditional, market-oriented frameworks and positions teachers as agents of social transformation, capable of navigating and reshaping the complex realities of their educational contexts (Barahona, 2016; Seligman, 2011; Deci & Ryan, 2000, Ramos, 2018).

Translating Theory into Practice: Initial Implementation Examples

As Chilean teacher educators working within the public university education system can only dream to implement such ideas nationally, but we have had the opportunity to work hand-in-hand with colleagues that have advanced in the implementation of the seeds for a model like the one presented. We both work in an undergraduate English Teacher program, educating the future generation of teachers. In such program, there are three main areas, Research Training Area, Disciplinary Knowledge Area, and English Language Teaching Practice and Pedagogy Area. We have been carrying out our professional development within this last area for more than 10 year; from

that experience, we have adapted four courses following the model presented in Figure 1 above: *Clima de Aula y Competencias Socio-Afectivas,* the *Estrategias de Manejo de Aula, Curriculum en TEFL, and Diseños Metodológicos en TEFL.* The syllabi of these courses have been developed the whole English Teacher program staff.

For example, the Emotional & Relational Training component can be seen in our university's existing *Clima de Aula y Competencias Socio-Afectivas* [Classroom Climate and Socio-Affective Competencies] course in which we integrate SDT-driven practices together with responsive well-being interventions. This course focuses on developing pre-service teachers' emotional competencies, creating positive classroom climates, and understanding the socio-emotional dimensions of teaching This course also develops emotional harmony and affective needs and emotional regulation and modulation, carrying out concrete interventions such as daily self-awareness practices integrated into breathing and relaxation exercises. The course syllabus emphasis specially on emotional competencies and positive classroom climate creation; this is aligned with evidence-based positive psychology interventions such as gratitude journaling, where student teachers document positive teaching moments daily, and strengths identification activities that help themselves to recognize and apply their character strengths in classroom contexts. Student teachers also document their experiences in bilingual reflective portfolios, exploring how their own cultural backgrounds inform their emotional responses to teaching challenges and directly addressing the psychological safety issues that teachers like Constanza face when their Chilean identities are devalued in English teaching contexts.

Similarly, the Well-being Interventions component operationalizes positive psychology through the transformation of the *Estrategias de Manejo de Aula* [Classroom Management Strategies] course, moving beyond individual resilience building to community-centered approaches that reflect Chilean collective values. This course addresses classroom management techniques grounded in Positive Discipline principles, teaching pre-service teachers strategies for creating orderly, respectful learning environments while maintaining authority through democratic and collaborative approaches rather than punitive measures. The course's Positive Discipline principles are reframed through SDT-driven practices where student teachers experience autonomy by choosing from culturally diverse conflict resolution strategies, develop competence through peer mentoring, and build relatedness through solidarity circles with other university students facing similar challenges. These interventions, among other, include structured gratitude practices that are focused on recognizing the cultural assets students bring to English classrooms; strengths identification workshops, helping future teachers articulate how their multilingual repertoires and working-class experiences constitute pedagogical resources; and school partnership projects, in which student teachers collaborate with schools to design English learning opportunities that serve the schools needs rather than abstract linguistic competencies.

Furthermore, we add to this implementation the Decolonial Curriculum component which complements the *Curriculum en TEFL* [TEFL Curriculum] course by requiring student teachers to engage in critical curriculum archaeology that examines how imported English textbooks systematically erase Chilean voices while positioning Global North cultural contexts

as universal. This course explores curriculum theory and design in English language teaching, examining how to develop curricula that address social responsibility, hidden curriculum, and the relationship between curriculum policy and classroom practice in Chilean contexts. Hence, instead of abstract discussions about "hidden curriculum," student teachers conduct school materials and textbook analysis projects in which they identify specific instances of both colonial bias and current socio relevant issues, redesigning these lessons to center Chilean working-class family traditions, Indigenous worldviews, and local environmental justice issues. The course's focus on social responsibility is also operationalized through the development of nuclearization strategies and lesson planning: student teachers collaborate with each other analyzing socio-relevant issues in line with content-based instruction. In this sense, pre-service teachers can develop understanding and they can work with colleagues to position themselves as knowledge producers rather than passive instructors of foreign language and culture.

Finally, the Pedagogy of Alterity component integrated in the *Diseños Metodológicos en TEFL* [Methodological Designs in TEFL] course through lesson design workshops. This course focuses on English language teaching methodologies, approaches, and instructional design, preparing pre-service teachers to implement diverse pedagogical strategies while addressing Special Educational Needs and adapting methods to diverse learner populations. Student teachers move beyond merely designing decontextualized lessons and activities to recognize, for example, that Chilean students' strategic use of Spanish-English code-switching represents sophisticated metalinguistic competence rather than deficiency requiring remediation. Practical implementation includes community-

responsive microteaching, deliberately incorporating students' full linguistic repertoires; and critical reflective circles, sharing strategies for resisting monolingual bias. This approach directly challenges the colonial assumption embedded in traditional TEFL methodologies that "authentic" English teaching must replicate native-speaker cultural contexts, instead preparing Chilean teachers to create pedagogical spaces where students' multilingual identities are centered as educational resources rather than problems to be solved.

Implications and Conclusion

In this chapter we advocate for a deep transformative process, reimagining ITE in ELT in Chile, with broader relevance for the Global South. We propose the bases for a model that is centered in the teacher's well-being, emotional resilience, and relational capacities, integrating decolonial, intercultural, and inclusive perspectives. This approach challenges the prevailing technical and market-oriented paradigms, positioning teachers as agents of social transformation (Barahona, 2016; Seligman, 2011; Deci & Ryan, 2000). We acknowledge this is not entirely new but a current understanding of the main elements that have been around from critical perspectives in ITE and ELT.

We argue that teacher education should move beyond skill acquisition to nurture the holistic development of teachers, including their mental health, socio-emotional skills, and ethical responsibility toward students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Levinas, 1969). This attempt needs to be complemented with the recognition and active dismantling of the structures that perpetuate educational inequality, including rethinking language policies, resource allocation, and the social functions ascribed to English proficiency in Chile (Torrico-Ávila et al., 2021; Byrd,

2013). We also call for prioritizing well-being, relationality, and cultural responsiveness; our proposal believes in cultivating a sustainable and transformative teaching profession, one that is better equipped to meet the diverse needs of learners/teachers and contribute to a more just society (Gu & Day, 2007; Waters et al., 2022).

Indeed, transforming initial teacher education in ELT in Chile requires a paradigmatic shift, from a narrow focus on technical skills and standardized assessments to a holistic, context-sensitive, and justice-oriented approach. Such a transformation holds promise not only for improving educational outcomes but also for advancing social equity and human flourishing in the broader society.

Constanza's story, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, exemplifies the lived experiences of many aspiring teachers who face systemic barriers and emotional challenges rooted in colonial legacies and inequitable educational structures. Her experience highlights the urgent need to center teacher well-being, emotional resilience, and relational capacities within initial teacher education. By placing stories like Constanza's at the heart of our model, we underscore the importance of nurturing not just technical competence but also the holistic development and empowerment of future educators.

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CHAPTER 15

Beyond Silence: Queer Inclusion and Affirmation in Vietnamese ELT through Narrative Reflection

Mai Phuc Thinh

Abstract

This chapter explores how narrative inquiry can illuminate and humanize the lived experiences of queer students and teachers in Vietnam's ELT contexts. Drawing on four anonymized narrative accounts developed from in-depth interviews with queer students and teachers in Vietnam, this chapter presents stories of resilience and quiet transformation: a closeted rural teacher, a nonbinary student finding voice through reflective writing, an urban educator embracing inclusive storytelling, and a trans learner reclaiming identity in a private center. Grounded in positive psychology and decolonial pedagogy, the analysis reframes ELT as more than a space for language acquisition; it becomes a site for healing, identity negotiation, and ethical engagement. The chapter argues that true inclusion requires more than curricular reform; it demands affective, relational shifts anchored in care, courage, and critical love. In contexts where queer lives are often silenced, these stories act as pedagogical resistance, realizing the volume's vision of restorative, humanizing practice in Global South classrooms.

Keywords: Positive psychology, queer inclusion, English Language Teaching (ELT), teacher identity, Vietnamese education

Introduction

In Vietnam's educational landscape, queer students, and at times queer teachers, often find themselves relegated to the margins, both socially and institutionally. Despite growing public visibility of LGBT issues, Vietnamese schools continue to be shaped by heteronormative assumptions, limited SOGI-related information, and inconsistent institutional responses to bullying (Human Rights Watch, 2020; UNESCO, 2016). These school-based dynamics are embedded in broader socio-cultural pressures around family, respectability, and heteronormative belonging in Vietnam (Horton & Rydstrom, 2019). These dynamics are part of a broader pattern in which queer individuals navigate complex negotiations of visibility, authenticity, and belonging across cultural and institutional settings. As Thinh (2025) shows in his study of Vietnamese gay men's transnational mobility, such negotiations often entail emotional labor and affective recalibration within systems that oscillate between tacit tolerance and structural exclusion. Within English Language Teaching (ELT), these tensions become particularly visible, as teachers and learners navigate a subject positioned between global openness and local constraint. While English classrooms can, in theory, offer opportunities for exploring identity, empathy, and intercultural understanding, Tran-Thanh's (2020) study suggests that some Vietnamese EFL classrooms remain shaped by limited teacher knowledge, lack of professional training, and the underrepresentation of LGBTQ+-related content.

As a Vietnamese researcher working in education, my engagement with this topic is both professional and personal. During my time teaching, conducting research, and working alongside students and educators, I witnessed firsthand the emotional toll that invisibility, fear, and institutional silence inflict on queer individuals in ELT spaces. At the same time, I encountered moments of solidarity, creative resistance, and hope, often emerging from everyday classroom interactions or community-led initiatives that dared to imagine something different. These encounters became the impetus for this inquiry: a desire to document, affirm, and reflect upon the lived realities of queer students and educators in Vietnam's ELT contexts, while also contributing to a broader conversation about inclusive pedagogy in the Global South.

This chapter seeks to explore how queer inclusion can be imagined and fostered in Vietnamese ELT through affective, relational, and ethical practices. Rather than presenting a traditional empirical study or a policy analysis, the chapter offers a critical discussion informed by two intersecting theoretical lenses: positive psychology (PP), which emphasizes psychological safety, well-being, and the transformative power of supportive relationships (MacIntyre et al., 2019; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012); and decolonial pedagogy, which critiques normative educational logics and affirms localized, community-rooted forms of knowledge and care (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). These frameworks guide an inquiry into what it means to teach and learn English in a way that not only accommodates but actively celebrates diverse identities.

The chapter is structured around four illustrative narratives, drawn from in-depth interviews with queer students and teachers in Vietnam. These stories are not presented as

isolated testimonials, but as windows into the emotional, social, and pedagogical tensions that animate the ELT classroom. Each narrative reflects a different facet of queer experience, closeting, nonbinary identity, allyship, and trans visibility, offering insight into how power, language, and belonging intersect in Vietnamese education.

Through this narrative inquiry, I aim to contribute to an emerging field of scholarship that positions ELT not merely as a technical or linguistic endeavor, but as a deeply human one, an affective space where inclusion must be intentionally nurtured. In doing so, I echo the call for a pedagogy grounded in love, healing, and hope.

Theoretical Framework

Positive Psychology in ELT

PP offers an essential reorientation of educational practice, from a deficit model focused on correcting errors and managing behavior, to one that foregrounds human flourishing, emotional well-being, and relational growth. In the context of ELT, PP emphasizes the affective dimensions of language learning, particularly constructs such as hope, resilience, engagement, empathy, and self-efficacy (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Mercer et al., 2018). These elements are increasingly recognized as not only beneficial but foundational to language acquisition, especially among marginalized or vulnerable learners.

In classrooms where queer students may feel silenced, invisible, or unsafe, PP provides an alternative lens through which to construct affirming learning environments. By emphasizing relational safety and authentic expression, educators can design tasks and interactions that allow students to explore language as a medium of self-definition and social

connection, not merely as a tool for communication. For example, the use of reflective writing or storytelling in ELT classrooms can build emotional resilience while supporting linguistic development. Through positive teacher-student relationships and affirming classroom interactions, learners are empowered to express their identities, leading to increased motivation and agency (Dewaele et al., 2019; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Moreover, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) emphasize that teachers can influence students' emotions by creating classroom and task conditions that provoke constructive emotional responses and by working with the cognition that modifies emotional schemas. This does not position the language teacher as a therapist, but it does broaden the teacher's pedagogical role beyond linguistic modeling toward shaping the affective conditions in which learning becomes possible. This becomes particularly relevant in contexts such as Vietnam, where queer students may encounter stigma, silence, and uneven institutional support in school environments. The narratives in this study illustrate how ELT, when infused with care, listening, and affirming pedagogical choices, can offer spaces for emotional healing and self-recognition. In such moments, ELT transcends its instrumental purpose and becomes a site of transformation.

Decolonial Pedagogy

While PP addresses the emotional and relational dimensions of inclusion, decolonial pedagogy interrogates the structural and epistemic frameworks that render some identities, knowledges, and narratives marginal or invisible. Rooted in the works of scholars such as Mignolo and Walsh (2018), decolonial pedagogy seeks to disrupt the normative dominance of Eurocentric,

heteronormative, and neoliberal paradigms in education, including in ELT. It calls for the validation of alternative epistemologies, local ethics, and communal ways of knowing that have long been silenced or dismissed.

Within Vietnamese education, the dominance of Western-derived curriculum models and textbook content often reinforces normative gender and sexuality assumptions. Bui and Nguyen (2016) have shown how national English education policy in Vietnam tends to adopt global trends while struggling to integrate local cultural values and pedagogical realities. This disjuncture results in classrooms where teachers are encouraged to use communicative language teaching but are rarely given tools or permission to question the social ideologies embedded in the materials they teach. As a result, ELT risks perpetuating the very inequalities it has the potential to challenge.

A decolonial approach to ELT, therefore, begins with questioning not only whose English is taught but also whose lives, stories, and relationships are made visible or erased through classroom discourse. In this view, inclusion is not merely a matter of adding diverse content but of reorienting power dynamics in pedagogy and practice. The narratives in this chapter illustrate how Vietnamese teachers and students, especially those who are queer or gender non-conforming, negotiate these silences daily. In doing so, they often develop subversive practices of survival, resistance, and small acts of transformation.

One central tenet of decolonial pedagogy is the recognition of *nhân ái*[28], a Vietnamese ethical principle of compassion and

[28] *Nhân ái* is a Sino-Vietnamese term composed of "nhân" (humaneness, compassion) and "ái" (love, affection). It reflects a moral commitment to caring for others not as a duty, but as a deeply relational and affective impulse in Vietnamese thought.

benevolence, as a culturally rooted foundation for relational teaching. Rather than rely solely on imported frameworks of inclusion, educators in Vietnam can draw from this indigenous value system to cultivate classroom cultures grounded in empathy and care. Such an approach not only affirms the lived experiences of queer students but also positions ELT as a locally responsive and ethically informed endeavor. As Freire (1993) famously insisted, education is always a political act; decolonial ELT, when aligned with local moral traditions, becomes a form of collective healing.

Narrative as Inquiry and Possibility

If PP foregrounds well-being and decolonial pedagogy challenges dominant knowledge systems, narrative inquiry offers a methodologically and ethically grounded bridge between the two. Narratives, in this context, are not simply illustrative anecdotes but epistemological resources: ways of knowing, making meaning, and enacting agency. They provide insight into how individuals live through, respond to, and reshape their social worlds, particularly in contexts of marginalization or resistance (Barkhuizen, 2014; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In language education, storytelling is not only a means of practicing linguistic forms but a powerful mode of identity work. Queer pedagogy, for example, embraces storytelling as a way to question normative assumptions and foreground the complexity of desire, selfhood, and belonging (Kumashiro, 2002; Nelson, 2009). Within the Vietnamese ELT context, where queer identities are often relegated to silence, narrative serves as a counter-discursive strategy. It creates openings for students and teachers alike to express vulnerability, articulate resistance, and imagine alternative futures.

Situating the Context: Queer Students and ELT in Vietnam

In Vietnam, queer students navigate an educational landscape shaped by social invisibility, moral conservatism, and institutional silence. Historically, queer identities have been constructed as deviant, with state-run media in the early 2000s labeling homosexuality a "social evil" on par with drug use and prostitution (UNDP & USAID, 2014). Such discourse has reinforced entrenched heteronormative values within schools, often resulting in environments where queer youth feel compelled to hide their identities. Pejorative terms such as *bê đê* and *pêđê*[29] remain commonly used insults in Vietnamese classrooms (Human Rights Watch, 2020), reflecting the normalized stigmatization of sexual and gender diversity.

Institutionally, schools often mirror this societal conservatism. Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are weakly addressed in formal school structures: available evidence points to limited textbook representation, uneven teacher preparedness, and school policies that often fail to name the specific vulnerabilities of LGBT students (Human Rights Watch, 2020; UNESCO, 2016). Educators report treating queer topics as "sensitive" and thus avoid them entirely (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Students report frequent harassment, with some facing violence, verbal abuse, and exclusion from peer groups or even by teachers themselves (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Many educators are unprepared or unwilling to intervene,

[29] *Bê đê* and *pêđê* are Vietnamese phonetic derivations of the French slur *pédé* (from *pédéraste*), used as derogatory labels for gay or effeminate individuals. In Vietnam, these terms remain widely used as schoolyard insults and reflect systemic stigmatization of sexual and gender diversity.

reflecting broader socio-legal and cultural conditions in which same-sex sexualities have often been rendered marginal, morally suspect, or socially difficult to name (Horton & Rydstrom, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Within this broader context, ELT in Vietnam occupies a paradoxical space. On the one hand, ELT is often connected to international discourses, potentially introducing students to inclusive and pluralistic perspectives through globally sourced materials, intercultural communication tasks, or literature that addresses diverse identities (Tran-Thanh, 2020). On the other hand, ELT classrooms operate within national systems that discourage open discussion of sexuality. Teachers may hesitate to address queer content because of limited training, institutional uncertainty, and the sensitivity of gender and sexuality in Vietnamese education. At the same time, Le et al. (2023) show that queer teacher identity can become a pedagogical resource in Vietnamese ELT, as students in their photovoice study associated a transgender English teacher with professionalism, confidence, inclusiveness, and belonging. This contradiction, between the progressive potential of ELT and the conservative constraints of Vietnamese schooling, places educators in a difficult position. As a result, even teachers who express sympathy toward LGBTQ+ students may hesitate to incorporate queer-related materials, particularly when they lack professional training or institutional support (Tran-Thanh, 2020).

The consequences of this exclusion are not merely symbolic; they carry tangible emotional and pedagogical costs. Queer students report elevated levels of depression, isolation, and educational disengagement. UNESCO's Vietnam study found that among LGBT students who had experienced school-related violence, 24.9% reported thoughts of suicide or self-injury in the

previous 12 months, while 14.9% reported intentional self-injury or attempted suicide (UNESCO, 2016). The absence of representation in textbooks and teacher discourse perpetuates a climate of invisibility, further exacerbating internalized stigma (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Meanwhile, Le et al. (2023) show through the case of Lien, a transgender English teacher, that queer teacher identity can reshape students' perceptions of professionalism in ELT. Rather than seeing professionalism as detached neutrality, Lien's students associated it with care, confidence, relational safety, and the creation of a gender-inclusive classroom.

Despite persistent challenges, grassroots and community initiatives have emerged as critical agents of change in Vietnam's education sector. Organizations such as the ICS Center, the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE), and the Center for Rural Development in Central Vietnam (CRD) have each advanced efforts to support queer students and equip teachers with inclusive pedagogical tools. ICS's Rainbow School initiative has provided practical resources to help schools create supportive environments, while iSEE's 2019 qualitative study on public perceptions of same-sex marriage in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City provides evidence for understanding social attitudes and designing more effective public-awareness strategies. Building on these community-based efforts, the Center for Rural Development in Central Vietnam (CRD) has launched a 2023–2024 project aimed at preventing and addressing gender-based violence related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, with an emphasis on empowering teachers and fostering safe, inclusive school climates (CRD, 2023). Although largely operating outside formal state structures, these initiatives collectively create pathways for inclusion that English teachers

can draw upon, forming an ecosystem of support for more equitable and affirming ELT practices in Vietnam (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to examine the lived experiences of queer individuals within the ELT context in Vietnam. Rooted in constructivist and transformative paradigms (Lincoln et al., 2011), the research prioritizes meaning making through storytelling, reflexivity, and situated knowledge. Rather than positioning individuals as passive research subjects, the study regards participants as co-narrators whose personal accounts illuminate the emotional, pedagogical, and sociocultural tensions that often remain obscured in formal ELT discourse. Narrative inquiry is especially apt for amplifying marginalized identities in educational contexts where institutional silence prevails, enabling voices and subjectivities that are typically excluded from policy and curricular texts to emerge with clarity and depth (Barkhuizen, 2014; Clandinin, 2013).

The study is conceptually grounded in two intersecting theoretical lenses. PP offers a framework for examining how well-being, resilience, and identity affirmation can be cultivated within inclusive ELT practices (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). This emphasis on emotional safety aligns with efforts to reframe ELT as a site not only for language development but also for healing and flourishing. In tandem, decolonial pedagogy interrogates epistemic hierarchies, critiques normative curricular frameworks, and affirms local and marginalized knowledges (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Walsh, 2007). Together, these

frameworks inform an affective and socially attuned methodology, one that seeks not only to represent queer narratives in ELT but also to reflect, challenge, and transform the conditions under which such narratives unfold.

Participants and Data Collection

Four participants were purposefully selected through criterion-based and snowball sampling strategies (Patton, 2002), ensuring a spectrum of queer voices with direct engagement in ELT in Vietnam. All participants either identified as queer or were allies with firsthand experience navigating English education, either as students or educators. Their stories represent diverse intersections of identity, language, and institutional context. The participants were:

- "Thầy Lâm" – a closeted gay English teacher at a public high school in a rural province.
- "Chi" – a cisgender female English teacher at an urban public secondary school who identifies as an ally.
- "An" – a nonbinary undergraduate student enrolled in a university-level English-speaking class.
- "Minh" – a transgender student attending a private English language center in a metropolitan city.

Each participant took part in a semi-structured, in-depth interview conducted in Vietnamese, lasting between 60 to 90 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, using open-ended guiding questions to facilitate narrative responses around identity negotiation, classroom interactions, emotional safety, and reflections on inclusion and exclusion in ELT spaces. Transcripts were later translated into English by the researcher and verified for accuracy. Participants were invited to

review their narratives for clarity and authenticity. All names were anonymized, and identifying details modified while retaining the affective and narrative integrity of each account.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using narrative thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008), complemented by interpretive techniques rooted in Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional narrative space: interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, future), and situation (place and context) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Each narrative was first read holistically and then thematically coded across the following dimensions:

- Experiences of affirmation, alienation, or erasure in ELT settings
- The role of English language in expressing or concealing identity
- Pedagogical tensions (e.g., textbook constraints, teacher fear, supportive practices)
- Emotional and relational dynamics in learning or teaching English
- Intersections between personal identity and institutional power

These themes were interpreted through the dual lenses of PP and decolonial pedagogy, examining how participants made meaning of inclusion, trauma, resilience, and agency in their engagement with English language education. Particular attention was paid to moments of dissonance, silence, and

transformation sites where institutional norms collided with personal identity.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the trustworthiness of this research, strategies were guided by Lincoln et al. (2011). Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement during interviews, allowing for meaningful rapport and depth. Participants were invited to review their narrative texts in a process of member-checking to confirm authenticity and co-constructed meaning. Rich, contextually detailed descriptions enhance the study's transferability, enabling readers to consider relevance across other ELT or Global South educational settings. Dependability was achieved through systematic documentation of the research process, including participant recruitment, translation, and thematic coding, all of which were reviewed reflexively throughout the study.

Confirmability was supported by my use of a reflexive journal to track evolving thoughts and my positionality as both insider and outsider, as a Vietnamese researcher informed by queer and ELT perspectives. Ethical care was prioritized at every stage: all participants provided informed consent after clear explanations of how their stories would be used in scholarly writing. While based on real experiences, all names and identifying details were anonymized to protect confidentiality. Throughout the research process, particular attention was given to portraying participants with respect, nuance, and empathy, avoiding any reductive or sensationalist framing of their narratives.

Narrative Findings: Stories of Language, Identity, and Possibility in Vietnamese ELT

Teachers' Narratives

"Thầy Lâm"[30] – A closeted English teacher in a rural high school

In a quiet town tucked into Vietnam's countryside, Thầy Lâm has been teaching English for over a decade. To his students, he is a calm, competent presence, always prepared, and always polite. But behind the chalkboard smiles and carefully planned lessons lies a truth he cannot speak. Thầy Lâm is gay, and no one at his school knows.

Each day, he stands before a class of teenagers, teaching textbook units filled with heteronormative assumptions. Lessons on "My father is a farmer" and "My mother cooks rice every day" flow easily from the curriculum, yet each sentence lands heavily on him. He follows the syllabus word for word, never straying into territory that could raise suspicion. In his school, even a passing reference to two fathers or same-sex love could provoke questions, complaints, or worse, an end to his career.

In the staffroom, teachers make jokes about "modern immorality" and worry aloud that Western influence is "turning boys gay." Thầy Lâm laughs along softly, his real feelings hidden behind a teacup. He has heard stories of teachers being warned, reprimanded, or quietly removed for addressing queer topics in class. His own fear is not hypothetical; it is survival.

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[30] *Thầy* is a Vietnamese honorific meaning "male teacher." It conveys respect and authority, but also implies heteronormative masculinity. In conservative rural contexts, the title often carries implicit expectations of moral conformity, including assumptions about gender and sexuality.

The silence he maintains is heavy, and moments arise that test its limits. Once, a student casually asked in class, “Thầy, what does ‘gay’ mean?” The room went quiet. Eyes turned to him, waiting. In that suspended moment, his heartbeat grew loud in his ears. Smiling, he gave the safest answer he could think of: “It means happy.” Some students giggled. He moved on quickly, feeling the weight of what he didn’t say.

He sees students like Bảo, soft-spoken, often teased, called names like *bê đê*. One afternoon, he found the boy crying by the hallway. Thầy Lâm longed to say something comforting, something real. Instead, he offered a quiet pat on the shoulder and the usual encouragement to “focus on studies.” He reported the bullying in vague terms but avoided naming the reason. There were no school policies to back him up. No training. No safe language.

Still, he finds discreet ways to resist the silence. He once placed a Vietnamese-language queer story collection on a shelf in the local library. He participates in online forums as a “friendly teacher,” offering advice to queer youth under a pseudonym. A colleague, whom he suspects also hides his identity, once confided that he mentors a lesbian student privately, sharing resources after school hours. They both understand the risk. And the need.

Thầy Lâm lives with this duality, professional dedication and personal concealment. His colleagues often ask when he will marry, and he smiles. At night, he grades papers alone in his rented room, wondering how many more years he can keep this up. His dream is simple: to one day teach a class where he does not have to pretend. Where family lessons include all families. Where a student like Bảo will know he is not alone.

Until then, he continues his quiet balancing act. A teacher who loves his job, but whose full self remains locked away. He enters the school each morning with steady steps, carrying not only textbooks and lesson plans, but also the burden of all he cannot say.

"Chi" – A cisgender female English teacher in an urban school

Chi had always thought of herself as a careful, competent English teacher. At her public secondary school in Ho Chi Minh City, she followed the curriculum diligently and prided herself on being approachable and professional. For years, she had taught grammar, led speaking activities, and assigned textbook dialogues without ever questioning whose stories were being told, or left out. That changed on a sweltering Saturday when she attended a teacher development workshop on LGBT+ inclusion.

In a room filled with educators from across the city, Chi listened as facilitators spoke about school bullying, invisible students, and the silence that surrounds gender diversity. The stories shared, of queer students mocked, of teachers unsure how to intervene, landed heavily. One session on inclusive storytelling particularly stayed with her. The speaker asked: “Whose stories did you grow up reading? And whose were missing?” Chi suddenly realized that in all her years of teaching, every story she had assigned, whether a folk tale, a dialogue, or a reading comprehension exercise, assumed a world of straight characters and traditional roles. She left the workshop filled with questions, and a quiet determination.

The following week, Chi recalled a moment from the previous year: Minh, a boy in her homeroom class, had once been ridiculed for wearing nail polish. The teasing had made him retreat into silence. At the time, Chi had heard the snickers and

whispers, words like *bóng*[31] thrown around casually, but had said nothing, believing that ignoring the incident would de-escalate it. Now, with the workshop's lessons still fresh in her mind, she realized her silence had been complicit.

She decided to make a change.

During a unit on storytelling, rather than defaulting to the textbook's tale of a prince and a princess, Chi introduced a new reading: a gentle fable about two male penguins raising an egg together. She found the story on an educational forum and chose it for its simplicity, warmth, and subtle challenge to norms. "Let's read a different kind of story today," she said, handing out the sheets.

At first, the class reacted with giggles. A student asked with a grin, "Cô ơi, are they... like partners?" Chi answered evenly, "Yes, in this story, they are a family." A few raised eyebrows. One girl smiled and said, "That's cute," while a boy joked, "Which one is the mom?" Before Chi could reply, another student said matter-of-factly, "They're both the parents. Like two dads." What followed was a hesitant, thoughtful discussion, about animals, about families, and about difference.

After class, a shy student lingered to tell Chi that her cousin had two mothers. Another said the story was "weird but cool" and asked if there were more like it. That night, Chi received an unexpected email from Minh, who had transferred classes. He'd heard about the story and wrote, simply, "I wish we had read something like that before."

From that moment on, Chi began rethinking her teaching practices. She didn't overhaul everything, exams and curriculum

[31] Bóng (literally "shadow") is a colloquial Vietnamese term often used pejoratively to refer to effeminate or gay men.

still loomed, but she made space for new stories. She changed the gender roles in classroom role-plays, used open-ended prompts that allowed for diverse family structures, and gently corrected language when students used slurs. Most importantly, she started an “English Story Circle” during lunch, where students could write and share their own stories. One student brought a tale of two princes in love. The class clapped when it ended.

Chi understood that creating an inclusive classroom wasn’t about loud declarations. It was about everyday acts: a different story, a changed pronoun, a refusal to ignore a harmful word. Her role had shifted, from passive observer to quiet ally. She began to see her authority not just as a responsibility to deliver content but as an opportunity to model empathy, fairness, and curiosity.

Each small change strengthened the relationships in her classroom. Students asked more questions, listened more attentively, and seemed more willing to speak freely. For Chi, inclusion had become more than a concept, it had become a practice. Teaching English now meant teaching care, connection, and imagination. And for the first time in her career, she felt that her classroom was not only a place to learn grammar, but a space where all kinds of students could feel safe, and maybe even seen.

Students’ Narratives

"An" – A nonbinary student in an English-speaking class at university

An is a third-year university student who quietly navigates a campus life shaped by binaries that rarely fit. In Vietnamese and in English, classrooms often demand answers to questions they don’t feel equipped to give. During a recent English lesson on describing people, the class was prompted to practice with a partner using the sentence: “Is your best friend a boy or a girl?”

The moment the question appeared on the screen, An felt their chest tighten. Their best friend is nonbinary, like them. The words, simple on the surface, left no space for who they were or the people they loved.

Around them, classmates chatted easily, "She's really pretty," "He plays football", but An said nothing. They gave a vague answer, letting their partner speak while they faded into silence. It wasn't about fluency; it was about recognition. English, a language they'd once hoped would be more flexible than Vietnamese in naming identity, suddenly felt just as limiting.

Growing up, An had already learned to duck under expectations. In high school, they wore the loosest uniforms they could get away with and kept their hair short, but were still called *cô ấy*[32] by classmates and teachers. The constant gendering wore them down. Now, in university, they live more openly with friends, using "nonbinary" to describe who they are. But in academic settings, they retreat. No professor has ever asked for preferred pronouns. The textbooks default to "he/she." Group work is often split "boys vs. girls." And though An's appearance sometimes draws puzzled looks, the environment discourages questions or explanations.

Despite their discomfort, An tries to avoid confrontation. In class discussions, they phrase their comments abstractly, "Some people might feel…" instead of "I feel…" They know that drawing attention to themselves might risk confusion, judgment, or dismissal. A small moment during a presentation still lingers in their mind: after they finished speaking, a classmate referred to An as "she," then stammered, corrected to "uh, the presenter,"

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[32] *Cô ấy* is a Vietnamese third-person pronoun meaning "she" or "that girl," used here despite An's gender nonconformity. The expression reflects how linguistic norms often enforce binary gender expectations in school settings

and moved on. The awkwardness felt like a spotlight. Even more painful was the professor's quiet smirk, as if the moment were an amusing grammar error rather than a human misrecognition.

But in a creative writing elective, something shifted. The lecturer, a soft-spoken woman with international experience, assigned weekly reflective journals and encouraged students to explore personal memories. One week, the prompt asked students to describe a moment when they felt different. An hesitated, then wrote about childhood, the discomfort of dresses, the secret thrill of imagining themselves as the knight rather than the princess, and the alienation of being referred to by the wrong pronouns in class. They ended the entry with a sentence they had never dared speak aloud: "I am not a boy or a girl, I am just me, and I am still learning how to say that in any language."

When the journal was returned, the lecturer's comment was short but sincere: "Thank you for sharing such a personal story, An. Your voice is clear and authentic. Keep exploring, your perspective matters." For the first time in an academic space, An felt seen. The validation was quiet, but powerful.

Since then, something in An has softened. They've started speaking up a little more in group discussions. During one project, they volunteered to be team leader, helping classmates navigate tasks across gender lines without explanation. One close peer now uses "they" for them in English without hesitation. These are small shifts, but meaningful ones.

An still keeps the journal with the lecturer's note. On hard days, they reread it as a reminder that language can also be a home, not just a tool for exams or essays, but a way to claim space. In Vietnamese, their options remain limited. But in English, through reflective writing and subtle classroom changes, they've begun to carve out a voice that feels more like their own.

"Minh" – A trans student in a private language center

At 19 years old, Minh found herself seated in the back row of an upper-intermediate English class, the kind filled with university students and young professionals brushing up their skills for international English exams. A simple name tag rested on her chest: “Minh” written in clean blue marker, neither declaring nor denying anything. For Minh, that name was more than just a label, it was a lifeline. In this private English language center, no one questioned the name. No one asked if it matched the one on her birth certificate. And most importantly, no one tried to correct it.

Back in her high school years, Minh had been another person entirely, at least in the eyes of others. Her teachers, her classmates, and her school records all recognized a male identity she never truly inhabited. The boys' uniform, the masculine pronouns, the daily corrections when her gestures appeared “too soft”, they accumulated like bruises on her psyche. Each morning in the mirror, she faced a body and a uniform that betrayed her. The school’s dress code left no room for expression. The classroom left no room for visibility. She became expert at shrinking herself.

But in this English center, unbound by uniforms and rigid codes, Minh discovered a quieter kind of freedom. On the first day, her teacher, a foreign instructor named John, casually asked the class if they preferred any specific names or nicknames. It was an unassuming gesture, routine for him perhaps, but revolutionary for her. When she answered “Minh, please,” and heard it echoed without hesitation or skepticism, something within her settled. It was the first time in an educational setting

that her chosen name had been accepted as a given, not a negotiation.

In English, Minh found a space where she could simply be. The language's pronoun structure was still binary, but it also offered something Vietnamese did not, an "I" unmarked by gender, a "you" free from familial hierarchy or social rank. In class discussions, her peers usually referred to her by name, not "he" or "she." There were no whispers about her voice, no sidelong glances at her clothing. When she spoke, it was her ideas that were heard, not her gender expression.

Minh's confidence grew slowly but steadily. At first, she was reserved, carrying the trauma of high school with her. She expected laughter, misgendering, some form of ridicule. But none came. During one class debate on traditional gender roles, she tentatively suggested that "not everyone fits into the category of man or woman." Her classmates nodded, some offering their own examples of nontraditional families or relationships. The teacher gave her an encouraging smile. No one challenged her identity. Instead, her perspective became part of the class's collective learning.

One evening, Minh gave a short presentation on her dream of becoming an English teacher, one who would make sure students like her never had to feel ashamed or invisible. She spoke clearly, her voice firm despite the tremor of nerves. Her classmates clapped warmly, and one quietly said afterward, "Cảm ơn bạn. Mình ủng hộ bạn." That simple sentence, "thank you, I support you", stayed with her long after.

Outside the classroom, she began attending a small informal English-speaking gathering for queer learners run by volunteers from a local community hub. They sipped bubble tea and talked about movies, music, or dreams, all in English. There,

Minh met others like herself, young people navigating identity, safety, and voice in a society still unsure how to receive them. For once, learning a language wasn't about passing a test. It was about reclaiming agency.

In that classroom, Minh didn't just learn English, she found a new language for self-expression, one that allowed her to imagine futures she had never dared to name before. While she still moved cautiously in public, adjusting her voice in crowded buses or scanning faces before choosing where to sit, she carried into those spaces the self she had shaped in class.

In that modest center, Minh was not the trans student, not the target of jokes, not a topic to be whispered about. She was Minh, learner, speaker, future teacher. A young woman who had begun, word by word, to write herself into being.

Discussion

The four narratives, Thầy Lâm, An, Chi, and Minh, offer textured insights into the lived experiences of queer individuals navigating English language education in Vietnam. Though distinct in their positionalities, their stories converge around three interrelated themes: the emotional labor of educators, the psychological resilience of queer learners, and the transformative potential of minor pedagogical shifts. Together, they demonstrate how PP constructs (e.g., hope, engagement, belonging) and decolonial pedagogy (epistemic unsettlement, localized ethics) are enacted in concrete classroom moments, while the three-dimensional narrative space (interaction, continuity, situation) clarifies how these moments unfold over time and place. In combination, the insights illuminate the powerful interplay of vulnerability, empathy, and relational ethics in inclusive ELT, offering a

humanizing vision of language education shaped by care and courage.

Emotional Labor of Teachers

The narratives of Thầy Lâm and Chi reveal the considerable emotional burden that educators shoulder when navigating sexuality and gender diversity in constrained institutional contexts. Situated in a rural public school and interacting daily with colleagues and students who police heteronormativity, Thầy Lâm continually calibrates self-disclosure; across continuity (past reprimands heard, future risks anticipated), his silence in response to a student's inquiry about the word "gay" is not merely an evasion but a survival tactic—one shaped by a broader educational context in which LGBTIQ+ students and teachers remain marginalized and underrepresented (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Le et al., 2023). This maps directly onto the narrative ecology of risk and restraint that Clandinin and Connelly's framework helps surface.

In contrast, Chi's transformation—from passive observer to active ally—illustrates a different form of emotional labor: the courage required to break silence and challenge implicit norms. Her decision to introduce an inclusive story about two male penguins into her English class, though subtle, marked a pedagogical and moral shift, signaling her growing investment in fostering a classroom grounded in relational care. Through a PP lens, this move can be read as cultivating hope and teacher–student engagement (a micro-climate of safety that scaffolds participation), while, experientially, it reshapes the interaction–situation of the classroom so that diverse family forms can be named without ridicule. Such emotional engagement is rarely acknowledged in formal teaching evaluations, yet it is essential to

inclusive pedagogy (hooks, 2003; Palmer, 1998). Juxtaposed, the two cases show how the same institutional pressures yield divergent ethical responses: protective silence (Lâm) and careful, hopeful disclosure (Chi).

Psychological Resilience of Students

The student narratives of An and Minh underscore the remarkable resilience that queer students cultivate in order to survive and sometimes thrive within heteronormative educational landscapes. Both describe moments of silencing and misrecognition (binary pronoun exercises; restrictive dress codes), yet each also identifies a turning point where ELT environments afford reprieve.

For An, a reflective writing task created an interactional opening with a lecturer whose feedback affirmed identity; the situation (a creative writing classroom) and continuity (childhood memories → present self-naming → imagined futures) make visible how narrative space enables meaning-making that standard participation patterns foreclose. For Minh, a private language center's routine invitation to share preferred names generated belonging and self-efficacy, classic PP affordances linked to perseverance and voice. Both examples instantiate "identity-affirming microspaces" (localized zones of acceptance that counter systemic exclusion) and demonstrate how specific teacher moves—one written and reflective, one spoken and procedural—can elicit similar developmental outcomes (Leung et al., 2022; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Read comparatively, An's growth is catalyzed by narrative reflection; Minh's, by interactional recognition—two pathways toward the same PP endpoint of increased agency.

Small Pedagogical Shifts with Big Impacts

Across all four narratives, small yet deliberate pedagogical choices emerge as catalysts for transformation. These include rewording classroom prompts, introducing diverse stories, avoiding gendered grouping, and modeling affirming language use. Such shifts are not radical curricular overhauls; rather, they can be understood as small practices of critical hope and pedagogical resistance that unsettle normative assumptions embedded in daily teaching routines (Bozalek et al., 2014). In PP terms, these moves cultivate engagement and meaning; in narrative terms, they reorganize the interaction–situation of the classroom so that new identities become speakable.

Importantly, these changes signal to students that their identities are not only acknowledged but are valid topics for learning and dialogue. When Minh's teacher used her chosen name without hesitation, or when Chi reframed a storytelling activity to include diverse family structures, the effect was immediate and affirming. Seen side-by-side, the practices also clarify why Lâm's non-intervention—though understandable—preserves a fear-laden ecology that limits students' narrative options. These actions demonstrate that inclusive ELT is less about adding new content and more about reorienting the pedagogical stance toward care, curiosity, and critical reflection.

Empathy, Vulnerability, and Relational Ethics in ELT

The common thread linking all four narratives is the relational ethic at the heart of inclusive pedagogy. Whether teacher or student, each protagonist engages in ethical negotiation, balancing personal safety with a desire to foster understanding. This is evident in how individuals respond to discomfort: Lâm's silent support for a bullied student, An's calculated participation,

Chi's careful choice of text, and Minh's brave contribution to a class debate. These are not generic virtues; they are situated relational practices that reconfigure classroom interactions and shape learners' temporal continuities—precisely the terrain where an ethic of care becomes pedagogically consequential (Noddings, 2012). In ELT contexts, where communication is both means and content, such micro-relational moves recalibrate the affective climate of learning as much as its cognitive outcomes.

PP as a Framework for Affirmation and Growth

PP offers a valuable lens for understanding these dynamics. Rather than framing queer inclusion as a problem to be solved, it encourages educators to create environments where all learners can experience psychological safety, flow, engagement, and meaning (Seligman, 2011; MacIntyre et al., 2019). Minh's sense of belonging at the language center, An's emotional release through reflective writing, and Chi's pride in fostering open discussion all reflect PP's affective affordances. Placed in dialogue, the cases show complementary routes to flourishing: procedural routines that normalize recognition (Minh), dialogic writing that integrates identity (An), and pedagogical texts that seed hopeful imagination (Chi). These experiences point to ELT not merely as a conduit for grammar instruction, but as a platform for flourishing, where learners develop linguistic competence alongside emotional resilience, ethical awareness, and identity integration. In this view, ELT becomes an arena for healing as well as for education.

Decolonial Pedagogy and the Reclamation of Storytelling

Finally, decolonial pedagogy provides the scaffolding for interpreting the narratives as acts of resistance and reimagination. By centering lived experiences and emotional truths, each story disrupts the epistemic norms that privilege neutrality, objectivity, and Western curricular scripts. Chi's use of alternative texts, Minh's translingual identity work, and An's linguistic negotiation of selfhood exemplify decolonial practices that challenge binary logics, while Lâm's constrained agency exposes the institutional conditions that such pedagogy must transform. In narrative terms, each case reclaims storytelling as an embodied way of knowing and a locally resonant ethic of care; in decolonial terms, they instantiate small but consequential shifts in who and what counts as legitimate classroom knowledge (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). These are not just narratives of survival; they are acts of pedagogical world-making that carve out new imaginaries for what ELT can become.

Implications for Practice

The narratives presented in this chapter underscore the powerful role that English language teachers play in fostering inclusive, healing-centered classrooms, especially in contexts where queer students and educators continue to face marginalization. A central implication emerging from the stories of Thầy Lâm, An, Chi, and Minh is the importance of cultivating professional self-reflection. Teachers must critically examine how their own assumptions, silences, and pedagogical routines may inadvertently reinforce exclusionary norms. This kind of ethical introspection, grounded in relational responsibility and empathy, forms the first step in shifting ELT from a space of compliance to one of humanizing connection. In line with the vision of *Love, Healing, and Hope*, such reflection is not a solitary task but part

of a broader ecological commitment to loving pedagogy that resists deficit framings and affirms emotional well-being as a pedagogical priority.

At the classroom level, small yet intentional pedagogical acts, such as using reflective writing prompts, incorporating diverse texts, or offering name and pronoun choices, can have profound impacts on learners' sense of recognition and belonging. An's experience with reflective writing and Chi's storytelling-based adaptations illustrate that when teachers validate students' lived experiences, language learning becomes a site for identity construction and self-empowerment. These micro-level practices, rooted in the ethics of care and voice, resonate with the book's call for transformative decolonial ELT that centers compassion and affirming relationships. Furthermore, embedding student voice and emotional expression into ELT tasks creates fertile ground for developing the positive psychological strengths, resilience, courage, and agency that learners need to thrive in and beyond the classroom.

To sustain such shifts, systemic support is crucial. Teacher training programs must explicitly integrate topics on gender, sexuality, and identity into ELT preparation, moving beyond abstract notions of "diversity" toward actionable, contextually grounded strategies. Equally vital is institutional backing: school leaders and policymakers should ensure that educators who engage in inclusive practices are protected, supported, and celebrated. This also means forging partnerships with community-based organizations, such as ICS Center or IDEA Vietnam, whose expertise and resources can enrich teacher development. Drawing on the restorative ethos championed by this volume, I argue that inclusive ELT is not merely about correcting injustice; it is about co-creating pedagogical spaces of

healing, joy, and solidarity. These spaces allow all learners, regardless of identity, to find voice, connection, and hope in the language classroom.

Limitations

While this chapter draws on original narrative data collected through in-depth interviews with queer students and teachers in Vietnam, several limitations must be acknowledged. Given the sensitive nature of the topic and ethical considerations surrounding participant confidentiality, the narratives presented have been anonymized and reconstructed with care, which, while preserving emotional truth and contextual accuracy, may limit the specificity of demographic or institutional detail. The study's qualitative scope, though rich in depth, does not aim for broad generalizability; rather, it seeks to illuminate the affective and relational textures of inclusion and marginalization in Vietnamese ELT spaces. Additionally, while the chapter centers ELT as a potential site for transformation, it does not engage in a broader policy analysis or cross-institutional comparison. Future research could expand this work by incorporating longitudinal or multi-sited designs to further explore how inclusive practices evolve across time and varied educational landscapes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has shown how narrative inquiry, centered on the lived experiences of queer students and educators, can serve as a powerful tool of both resistance and renewal within ELT. These stories do more than reveal marginalization; they reimagine what inclusive pedagogy can look and feel like in everyday classrooms. Inclusion, as illustrated here, is not merely a matter of content modification or

curriculum supplementation; it is a relational practice rooted in empathy, affirmation, and ethical care. In contexts where institutional silence and moral conservatism still prevail, such narratives become quiet yet profound acts of love, healing, and hope. They resonate deeply with the aims of the forthcoming volume *Love, Healing, and Hope: Transformative Practices in Decolonial ELT through PP*, by demonstrating that humanizing language education requires not only the deconstruction of systemic oppression, but also the co-construction of supportive, courageous learning spaces where all identities are seen, valued, and allowed to flourish.

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AFTERWORD

Envisaging a Future Path for Positive Psychology and Decoloniality in ELT

Miguel Farias, Julian Chen, & Leonardo Veliz

As clearly articulated in the introductory chapter, the aftermath of the legacies of material and symbolic colonization have inflicted long-lasting wounds that, over time, have become chronic diseases. Many of these wounds have naturalized into one-size-fits-all curricula, standardized pedagogies, and deficit-based discourses that frame learners and teachers – particularly those from racialized, Indigenous, migrant, and linguistically diverse backgrounds – as perpetually lacking. These inherited structures, often invisible to those who benefit from them, continue to shape the emotional experiences, identity possibilities, and wellbeing of learners and educators within English language education.

While we as editors recognize the importance of disrupting and dismantling the oppressive systems and structures in English language education, we are equally mindful that transformation requires more than critique alone. Dismantling inequitable systems must be accompanied by an intentional commitment to imagining and cultivating alternative ways of being, relating, and learning. This means not only identifying the colonial legacies

that continue to shape ELT, through monolingual ideologies, assimilationist language policies, market-driven internationalization, and the commodification of English, but also fostering pedagogical, emotional and ecological landscapes that enable educators and learners to flourish within and beyond these constraints. This, to a certain extent, relates to Andreotti's (2011) decolonial idea of 'global mindedness' that places emphasis on reading the world through 'other' eyes.

It is from this commitment to imagining otherwise that we turn to dialogue – not as an illustrative device, but as a decolonial and relational praxis in its own right (Jain et al., 2026a). Dialogue allows us to linger with uncertainty, to listen across difference, and to make visible the affective, ethical, and political labor that underpins scholarly work (Chen & McAlinden, 2026). What follows is a dialogic reflection among the three editors, grounded in our shared yet differently situated experiences across the Global South and the Global North, as we collectively reflect on healing, care, and hope as necessary conditions for reimagining ELT futures.

Miguel: As we look back into the work we have done in putting together this volume, I remember that the first salient idea that came up in our preparatory meeting was that of healing and care. Perhaps as remnants from the pandemics, we talked about these two concepts as opening avenues of meaning in English language education to counteract the oppression from standardization, both in terms of measurement and preferred dialectal variations of the language, and for the pervasive performativity of native speakerism in the Global South. As we reflected on these issues, other powerful concepts came to the fore, such as hope and lovingness. And we found the umbrella paradigm of positive

psychology, which had already been used in the field of SLA. However, we immediately realized that the dynamics of these concepts worked differently in the context of the Global South where decoloniality was reexamining the sociocultural and political scenario of ELT. So, we embarked in the search for communicating vessels between these two framings and the answers that we got to the call for chapters was rich in reassuring that these connections exist and that they are marking a new stage in the history of ELT in the Global South.

Yet, apparently because of the hegemonic influence and focus of these paradigms on the individual and people, the avenues these chapters travel do not include the natural environment so that, for example, care can encompass nature and other non-human beings.

Julian: You read my mind, Miguel. I also recall those ongoing virtual meetings with you (in Santiago, Chile), Leo (Sydney, New South Wales) and myself (Perth, Western Australia) throughout the book project. We chatted in real time via Teams and (a)synchronously via WhatsApp, emailing and shared OneDrive. Not only were they thought-provoking and engendering inspirations, this collegial editorship has also brought our transnational, translingual, and humanizing repertories closer together (Jain et al., 2026b). We were not just talking about the book business as usual, but always checked everyone's emotional temperature, showing genuine care and love for each other. We situated our conversations in broader geo/sociopolitical, cultural, ideological, and affective dimensions given that the complex entanglements also impact the ELT landscape locally and globally. What matters is that ELT in the 21st century is no longer simply teaching the English language as is by following dominant

English norms (e.g. American/British), which are still entrenched in commercially ready textbooks, curricula, and national education reforms (e.g., English-medium instruction in the Global South). Rather, it challenges us to unravel and critically examine those ideological and emotional entanglements, shaping the way we teach, learn, and respond. Among all these uncertainties, messiness, and normativity surrounding us, we can't help but wonder how and where we can find solace and a beacon of hope in the current ELT landscape? Given what is actually happening in the world now, how can we bring hope, healing, and critical love to teaching and learning, particularly in those war-torn regions and vulnerable/marginalized communities? Having these hard conversations in our editorial meetings is a constant reminder of what propelled us to initiate this meaningful book project at the start and why it is important to shift from a confrontational lens (to defy English imperialism) to a healing approach that is most needed now.

Leo: Listening to both of you, I am struck by how much this project has been shaped not only by shared intellectual commitments, but also by a shared sense of exhaustion – what we briefly described in the introduction as epistemic and affective fatigue. After some years of naming coloniality, linguistic racism, native speakerism, and accentism in ELT, I found myself increasingly unsettled by a lingering question: *what comes after critique when critique alone no longer sustains us?* (Hodgson et al., 2017, 2020). This is not a rejection of criticality – far from it – but an acknowledgement that critique, when detached from care, can leave educators and learners emotionally depleted, relationally fragmented, and ethically adrift.

In my own work with racialized and migrant teachers (e.g. Abarzúa-Silva & Cabezas-Bravo, 2025; Veliz & Chen, 2024; Veliz, Gao, et al., 2024; Veliz, Heinrichs, et al., 2024; Veliz et al., 2026; Veliz et al., 2025), particularly in English-dominant contexts such as Australia, I have seen how deficit discourses are not only structural but deeply affective. Teachers are expected to be resilient, adaptable, and endlessly grateful, even as they navigate linguistic surveillance, accent discrimination, and institutional marginalization. Within such conditions, wellbeing is often framed as an individual responsibility, a matter of mindset or self-management, rather than as something shaped by histories of coloniality, racism, and exclusion. This is where I see a critical tension, but also a generative possibility, in bringing decoloniality into dialogue with PP.

For me, decolonial PP only becomes meaningful when it refuses depoliticized narratives of flourishing and instead sits with pain, anger, grief, and fatigue as legitimate responses to systemic injustice. Healing, in this sense, is not about returning to a prior state of wholeness – because for many, such wholeness never existed within colonial systems – but about creating conditions for collective repair, dignity, and recognition. Critical love, then, is not comfortable or benign; it is risky, unsettling, and often slow. It asks us to remain present with contradiction, to care without romanticizing, and to imagine otherwise while fully acknowledging the violence of what is.

What gives me hope in this volume is precisely this refusal of easy answers. Across the chapters, we see educators grappling with institutional constraints while still carving out spaces of relationality, solidarity, and ethical responsibility. These are not grand gestures of transformation, but small, situated acts of resistance and care, moments where language education becomes

a site of listening, healing, and collective becoming. In that sense, I see this dialogue, and this book, as an invitation: to pause, to breathe, and to ask how we might continue doing critical work *without losing our capacity to feel, to relate, and to hope together*.

Miguel: I totally agree with you, Julian and Leo, in that our conversations around this book have propitiated rich and often challenging discussions about political issues that extend well beyond the boundaries of ELT as a technical or methodological field. These dialogues have continually pushed us to confront how language education is entangled with broader structures of power, colonial legacies, neoliberal agendas, racialized hierarchies, and epistemic exclusions, that shape whose knowledge, voices, and languages are legitimized. What has been particularly meaningful for me is that these political conversations have never been abstract or detached; they have been grounded in our own situated experiences as educators working across different geopolitical, institutional, and affective contexts. In this sense, the book has become not only an academic project, but also a collective space for critical reflection, care, and ethical engagement, where questioning injustice and imagining alternatives have gone hand in hand.

Julian: Truthfully, before embarking on this book project, I had been engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning as well as researching through the feminist/radical lens, feeling supercharged to critique, disrupt and subvert those Anglocentric hegemonies, especially the long-held native-speakerism that reproduces linguistic discrimination, colonialingualism, and accentism. I have worked with Leo (Veliz & Chen, 2025; Veliz et

al., 2025) and other colleagues (Dobinson et al., 2024; Dobinson et al., 2025; Steele et al., 2025) in this space and felt it's vital to keep 'fighting' till we restore social justice and equity. Despite the advocacy work, I had also experienced the syndrome that Leo brought up in our Introduction, the 'epistemic fatigue'. Editing this volume with you both has been a breath of fresh air, taking me to reimagine our current and future ELT with 'flourishing praxis' as in the case of decolonial PP. I feel privileged to learn from and work with not only you both, but our chapter authors who have generously, innovatively and heartfeltly shared their insights, lived experiences in the Global South, and genuine care given to their ELT profession, student learning, and a brighter future amidst the precarity. More important, I can see an imaginable and attainable future for ELT stakeholders to connect to the Indigenous knowledges and cultures, raise awareness of how the environment and education can come into play, and champion heritage languages, cultures, and intersectionality that manifest who we are as different individuals. Sending my gratitude to you both and our contributors for helping me feel inspired and hopeful.

Miguel: Yes, Julian. Let me keep one concept that you have mentioned to finish my turn in this reflection: hope. Even though in my academic career I have engaged with criticality both in English language teacher education and in discourse analysis, attempting to debunk the hegemonic discourses that fetter our practices in the Global South, I find that the category of hope is not passive waiting for such criticism to have its effects but when engaged along critique it opens avenues for reflexive and situated action. As we close, hope is a key concept in the face of the current escalation of confrontations worldwide.

Leo: I'd like to pick up on your last remark, Miguel – that *"hope is a key concept in the face of the current escalation of confrontations worldwide."* For me, hope in this project has not been a naïve optimism or a denial of the violence, precarity, and exhaustion that currently shape our educational and political landscapes. Rather, it has emerged as a deeply political, affective, and ethical stance – one that insists on staying with discomfort while refusing resignation. In this sense, hope has functioned as a form of resistance: resistance to cynicism, to the normalization of inequity, and to the neoliberal demand that we detach ourselves emotionally from the consequences of our work.

What this book has allowed us to do collectively is to reframe hope, healing and love as something that is *practiced* rather than proclaimed or tangentially embraced (Norford & Veliz, 2026). It is enacted through listening, through slowing down, through centring voices that have historically been silenced, and through creating spaces where vulnerability, care, and intellectual risk-taking are not only permitted but valued. Hope here is inseparable from responsibility – it asks us to remain accountable to the communities we work with, to the knowledges we draw upon, and to the futures we help shape through our pedagogical and scholarly choices.

At a time when global conflicts, racialized violence, environmental devastation, and institutional retrenchment increasingly seep into our classrooms and professional lives, this form of critical hope becomes an ethical imperative. It reminds us that ELT is never neutral, and that our work, however constrained, can still open small but meaningful cracks in dominant structures. In coming together across differences, geographies, and epistemologies, this book has affirmed for me

that hope is sustained not individually, but collectively – through solidarity, relationality, and a shared commitment to imagining more just, caring, and liveable educational worlds.

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Love, Healing, and Hope invites readers to reimagine English language teaching as a deeply human, ethical, and transformative practice. Bringing together scholars and educators from the Global South and beyond, this volume weaves decolonial perspectives with critically oriented positive psychology to challenge deficit narratives, linguistic injustice, and colonial legacies in ELT. Through compelling stories, grounded pedagogies, and radical acts of care, the chapters show how love, empathy, healing, and hope can become forms of resistance and renewal. This book speaks to anyone who believes language classrooms can be spaces of dignity, belonging, and collective flourishing.

Truly, this collection gives me great hope. Combining the underlying humanistic values of positive psychology with the criticality of decolonial approaches, it offers rich insights which will be invaluable for anyone striving towards a more humanistic, equitable, and inclusive ELT.

- **Sarah Mercer**, *University of Graz*

This book contributes to the seismic shift away from corrosive deficit perspectives in English foreign language learning. Rather than listing undesirable languages, behaviours and outcomes, the authors adopt a positive psychology perspective and focus on what learners possess rather than what they lack, with the aim of helping them achieve linguistic success and happiness.

- **Jean-Marc Dewaele**, *VIZJA University, Poland;*
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