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WHITE PROFESSORS ENGAGED IN ANTI-RACISM: RACIALIZATION, PRAXIOLOGIES, AND CHALLENGES FOR CRITICAL LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

In this article, as white English teachers at a federal public university in Brazil, we problematize how we have constructed our processes of racialization in our life histories, and how these processes relate to the praxiologies[1] and curricula we experience. Allied with authors such as bell hooks (1994), Cida Bento (2022), Djamila Ribeiro (2019), Jacira Monteiro (2023), Gabriel Nascimento (2019), Esau MacCaulley (2021), among others, in this duo(auto)ethnography (Sawyer & Norris, 2016) we discuss the tensions we feel in our attempts to (re)position ourselves in relation to racial inequalities and how we are implicated in them by our own privileges. We expose ourselves at the risk of criticism as we attempt to generate new possibilities and search for new ways of building antiracist praxis in the areas of critical language education and language teacher education. We attempt to break the comfortable silences that, many times, white people tend to maintain regarding racism in Brazil and show how contextual and contingent antiracist pedagogies are.

Keywords: Antiracist language education; Racialization; Whitenes; Critical language teacher education

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Introduction: Why should English professors in Brazil recognize their race?

We are both professors of English and colleagues at a Federal University in Central-West Brazil. Through our commitment to engage in critical applied linguistics, we embrace the importance of turning our gaze inward, and expressing our disappointment in the ways that so much racism and inequality persist despite efforts to undermine them. For example, all around us, we see ways that legitimate English speakers are presented as and understood to be white people from the United States and Great Britain. Other white majority countries like Australia, Canada, and New Zealand seem to have similar status, while English speakers of color in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America are disregarded. Many of the colleagues we interact with – including fellow professors, undergraduate students and graduate students – tend to feel potentially discriminated against for falling under the label of "non-native speakers" of English as well as for being Brazilian. It is apparent to us that the issue of race and linguistic and professional (il)legitimacy in our field are crucially intertwined (Motha, 2020).

As we collaborate in teacher education projects together in our institution, we usually share and discuss our desire to further answer the call of Djamila Ribeiro (2019) to attempt a revision of our perception of ourselves and of the world we live in. Ribeiro points out that white people grow up feeling like they are normal and their privileges are part of the natural order, that the world could not be otherwise, and in this way they unwittingly condone racial inequality and violence. In our own experience, we rarely perceive black people occupying elite positions as professors, administrative employees or in elected or nominated positions of governance; however, we often perceive them in uniforms, working as members of the cleaning, kitchen, and security staff[2]. Grada Kilomba (2019) and Cida Bento (2022) make clear that racism is a problem created by white people; before Europeans enslaved Africans and characterized them all as "black," they were diverse peoples with diverse and thriving cultures. In other words, it is the responsibility of white people to contribute to changing this reality.

Inspired by the *cerrado* landscapes and culture in our region, which invite us to new local possibilities, we decided to create a text together, this text, and discuss our whiteness in relation to our praxiologies as university English professors in Brazil. Our goal is to problematize our white racialization and open ourselves for inquiry as we present and discuss our antiracist praxiologies. We ask, therefore: how do we come to see ourselves as racialized in our whiteness and how does this process contribute to what we do as university English professors? In other words, how does our racialization process become, so to say, curriculum in our language teacher education projects and what do we do to fight, resist and transgress racism? In order to construct our answers, we highlight the onto-epistemologies that underpin our discussions and help us create and recognize, as Grosfoguel (2011, p. 5) suggests, our positionality, that is, our locus of enunciation, which refers to the "geo-political and body-political location of the speaking subject."

By racialization, we mean the recognition that whiteness is not neutral or, as many may think, the absence of race; as Nascimento (2022, p. 7370) points out, it is the need to mark "the presence of the white body as one more, not as the only, universal one". Aníbal Quijano (2000, p. 534) affirms that race is a "mental category of modernity" and, as such, it structures social organization and our ways of thinking, feeling, acting. We believe that becoming more critical, aware, and ethically responsible towards racial inequality and violence is long past due, even if it may be, at times, very uncomfortable and even painful, as we make way for inquiry of ourselves.

Therefore, we write this text together, establishing, as well as generating, our locus of enunciation, our place of speech in relation to antiracist pedagogy in linguistic education. As we write, we break away from the comfortable silence of whiteness around racism, although not without acknowledging the risks of our blind spots and inconsistencies. We refuse to assign ourselves a humanist view of knowing and knowable subjects, capable of fully understanding or making ourselves understood. In this sense, in the next sections, we narrate part of our own histories and praxiologies and put them in dialogue and confrontation with critical and decolonial epistemologies. We divide the sections with stories from each one of us so as to show how we have built relationships and answers to the questions we asked above.

A few words on our methodological option: a duo(auto)ethnography

The idea to write this article relates to the partnerships we have developed in order to do critical and decolonial language teacher education together, in and out of our own institution. We decided to go back in time and share our life histories in this text after we realized how our paths converge as two white professors desiring to participate in and do antiracist education. In this sense, we have taken advantage of the possibilities that autoethnography and duoethnography approaches can offer for encouraging dialogue between educators toward and about their praxiologies. By praxiologies we mean "the epistemologies fused with our practices, mixed up in such a way that they cannot be expressed except in a single word" (Pessoa, Silva, and Freitas, 2021, p. 16). For these authors, the term replaces theories, especially because, in language education and language teacher education, theory cannot be dissociated from practice, as Freire (1970) points out.

Tonin (2018) calls attention to the fact that autoethnographies allow for personal stories to become spaces for critically discussing and problematizing social, historical, cultural, political, and affective matters. In our case here, we have aligned autoethnography and duoethnography characteristics in order to bring our stories into inquiry.

Sawyer and Norris (2016, p. 5) characterize a duoethnography as dialogue between two or three educators with similar and differing perspectives on a particular topic or construct, giving them opportunities "to explore how we

are situated in relation to practice and curriculum" as well as "the beliefs that underscore our perspectives and actions in relation to specific forms of practice". A duoethnography is known as "embodied and lived curriculum" (Sawyer & Norris, 2016, p. 7) and, as such, has its basis on William Pinar's concept of *currere*, that is, "understanding self": for Pinar (1975), *currere* is a critical form of autobiography and curriculum studies aiming to examine everyday life as curriculum.

Regarding one's life as curriculum, and curriculum as the everyday life we live, is especially significant to us as we attempt, in this text, to (re)conceptualize and (re)position ourselves in terms of racialization and engagement in antiracist education. It is in this sense that we invited each other to assist in the (re) conceptualization and (re)positioning of our selves and society, hoping to make this article pedagogic.

Since both autoethnographies and duoethnographies explore the contingent and relational nature of knowledge construction, in this text we join in looking back on our lives and offer the readers the way we see our racialization processes. By sharing our stories, we also learn from each other and expect the readers to find a way for themselves in our narratives as well. We have chosen to organize our stories in a sequence, rather than in a conversational mode, so that we display more details and reflections. Deeply engaged with Oliveira's (2021) thought, we agree that, as she claims, we must find ways to contest and confront our countries' colonial history in our ways of doing research. It is in that sense that we propose here a duo(auto)ethnography.

A white English professor, his privileges and antiracism

> Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions - a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom. (hooks, 1994, p. 12)

I grew up in a Jewish household, in rural Washington State, in the United States. My parents, Alison and Paul, came of age in the 1960s and were part of the hippie movement in Chicago, Illinois, and moved to Seattle, Washington, in the early 1970s, drawn by the spectacular beauty of the Puget Sound Region. Eventually they moved 100 miles north of the city to buy a piece of land and raise a family. Financially, they started poor, both from working class homes that could not offer them much, if any support. So, my father went to a community college to get a certificate in nursing and got a job at Northern State Mental Hospital. He tells the story of how his co-workers made a lot of comments about his long hair and beard. Meanwhile, with the help of hippie neighbors, my parents built

a one-room cabin, with a loft for them to sleep in. Little by little, they dug a well, installed plumbing and electricity. My older brother and I were both born in that simple cabin. My father got a new job at another local hospital in 1979, and they moved to a home on a small ranch, where they still live now. When I was 3, my mother followed in my father's footsteps and started a two-year community college certificate course in nursing, too. They both enjoyed full careers as Registered Nurses and are now retired.

I tell this very abridged version of my parents' life story because they firmly believed in personal responsibility, living within one's means, and dedication to a profession to achieve financial independence. As part of their vision, they strived for an idealized color-blind society. In their hippie experience, they cultivated the idea that standards for appearance and dress were oppressive and it was wrong to judge people for such. They believed in a meritocracy of the intellect and hard work. The idea of the Holocaust was extremely present in my upbringing, and a foundational aspect of their Jewish practice was a rejection of stereotypes, prejudice, racism, and nationalism. It was alright for my brother and I to curse as children, but if we ever used slurs against any race, sexual orientation, or gender, they quickly and severely verbally reprimanded us. Their commitment to undermining individual racism deeply influenced my own sense of racial (in)justice.

Another noteworthy aspect of my racialization process is that my older brother, Isaac, identified with political rap when he was in high school. Some of his favorite groups were Public Enemy and N.W.A., both of which decried racial inequalities in society, especially prejudiced policing. My brother was a gifted athlete, quarterback and captain of the football team. He bought a baseball cap that was all black with a white X in front, an overt nod to Malcom X. Soon, all of his teammates were wearing one, too. The rural community in which we grew up was almost all white. Our neighbors knew that overt racism was socially unacceptable, but expressed racist views in the privacy of their homes, and often slipped with comments and jokes that revealed their bigotry in public. The football team was the talk of the town in my brother's senior year, 1991, and it qualified for the state playoffs, with the whole crew wearing their Malcom X baseball caps almost everywhere they went. The next year, the film Malcom X, directed by Spike Lee, was released. For me, seeing the town's idols wear those hats while listening to Public Enemy shouting, "Fight the power!" and N.W.A. roaring, "Fuck the police!" in the football team's equipment room, certainly led me to think more about racial (in)justice and develop empathy for people who were the targets of racism.

Despite my parents' and brother's rejection of prejudice and racism, the idea of institutional racism did not really sink in for me until I was at Western Washington University as a Spanish major and English minor. The professor of the Hispanic American Experience, Lawrence Estrada, alerted us to the fact that, in the army, soldiers from racial minorities are overrepresented and are often the ones sent to carry out the most dangerous and lethal tasks. Not only that, he also pointed out that the U.S. prisons are overwhelmingly occupied by dark-

skinned people, while the universities are overwhelmingly occupied by white people. Additionally, my professor of the Structure of English, Anne Lobeck, wrote the textbook we used in class and in its Introduction, she discussed how people are denied employment and access to education because of their English repertoires (Lobeck, 2000), which is a veiled form of racism (Anzaldúa, 1987). At the time, I was also the assistant coordinator and volunteer tutor for an outreach program through the Woodring College of Education that supported Spanish-speaking youth in Bellingham's public schools. An integral aspect of my becoming a Spanish major and working in the outreach program was my political commitment to undermining inequalities through dedicating myself to underprivileged communities, especially immigrants. In many ways, my university education and extra-curricular activities were counter-hegemonic acts that today I feel reverberating in the words of bell hooks:

> We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization. Though they did not define or articulate these practices in theoretical terms, my teachers were enacting a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance that was profoundly anticolonial. (hooks, 1994, p. 2)

Here, she is referring to her experience in an all-black school and the work of her black teachers. In my case, I sought/seek out education as a political and anticolonial life project, aware that I am occupying space within the confines of predominantly white educational institutions.

It has taken me many years, more than two decades, to come to a deeper understanding of the roots of the individual racism that my parents rejected so strongly and the institutional racism that I perceived as being at the heart of so many of society's inequalities. Those years have been divided mostly between Brazil and the United States, but also Spain and Mexico. In all of those places, I have been uncomfortable with the occasional unmerited reverence that new acquaintances sometimes express towards me. I cannot help but wonder if they would have that same glimmer in their eyes if I were black. Of course, as people get to know me, they recognize that I have become quite *brazilianized* and never have been what most people expect from a stereotypical "American". What is more disturbing for me now is to reflect on how I was able to pursue a career in linguistic education and applied linguistics with a sense of security and belonging that a black person from any part of the world likely would not have had. As I have become more aware of the depths of white supremacy and white privilege over the years, I have also become more uncomfortable in my own skin. By reading texts by black female authors like bell hooks (1994), Cida Bento (2022) and Djamila Ribeiro (2019), in recent years, I have further problematized my privileges, even my opportunity to "chart [my] intellectual journey," which people of color are not allowed because "nonconformity on our part was viewed with suspicion, as

empty gestures of defiance aimed at masking inferiority or substandard work" (hooks, 1994, p. 5).

As part of my own opportunity to *chart my own intellectual journey*, my projects decry discriminatory policies and practices. For example, my second master's thesis dealt with ways that a policy in granting Teaching Assistantships at the University of Washington was discriminatory towards so-called "non-native" speakers of English. Still, in my doctoral defense, one of my intellectual mentors and members of the committee, Dr. Rachel Chapman, asked "After dedicating so much of your text to racial inequalities in Brazil, how could you not mention the race of the Brazilian professor participant?". Now, I am becoming more aware of how, even when attempting to cultivate racial awareness, I have often unintentionally contributed to inequalities (Ribeiro, 2019). Moreover, the intersectionality of my privileges and my personal success is built on a system of violence and racism, I cannot assume a position of morality and ethics as antiracist without recognizing that.

In Brazil, I have found the same sort of exclusion on the basis of conformity to an idealized linguistic standard that I became more aware of in Anne Lobeck's class at Western Washington University. In order to get into public, tuition-free universities, students must demonstrate conformity to such through their performance on either local or national college entrance exams. While the national affirmative action law, ratified in 2012, is changing the profile of who is occupying university campuses, the expectation within these spaces is still that everyone there adapts their linguistic repertoires, in other words, "speak[s] white." I say that because the process of creating national languages was carried out in Europe at the same time that these countries were colonizing the Americas (Veronelli, 2019). National languages and their standardization were a powerful tool in establishing who was a legitimate human and those against whom European colonizers, and those who sought their approval, could practice all means of violence. This is one of coloniality's strongest and least recognized legacies. Many of the most fervent ideologically progressive acquaintances I have in Brazil and the U.S., routinely ostracize those who do not conform to their linguistic ideals. For racial diversity to thrive, linguistic diversity must be recognized in step (Rosa; Flores 2017).

An author and colleague I admire, Gabriel Nascimento (2019) reinforces the connection between racism, linguicism, modernity, and coloniality. He uses the term linguistic racism to describe how European colonial projects around the world reified whiteness as universally neutral and all non-white peoples and their ways of knowing and speaking as other and inferior. Embracing linguistic diversity is a movement away from what Nascimento calls the European fetishization of national languages, which are idealized and imaginary, an artificial construct aimed at generating and perpetuating national unity. In contrast to this idea, when we *language* we are engaged in a creative process of both generating the language and ourselves (Fairclough; Wodak, 1997; Hall, 1994). Enforcing language norms is a form of epistemicide and linguicide, which has several

implications for linguistic education, which both Mariana and I will return to in future paragraphs.

It is striking to me that, during my life journey, prejudice and racism have not diminished (cf. Wilkerson, 2020; Egan, 2023), as I expected they would, despite so many of the people in my social groups being opposed to individual and institutional racism. In Brazil, racial inequality is absolutely staggering and it is clear that such disparities can be linked to the legacy of hundreds of years of whites enslaving Africans and the continued racism upon which that exploitation was founded (Ribeiro, 2019). I understand that overcoming such deep-rooted social ills is complex, but it started to make a lot more sense to me when I considered that the society we live in is still profoundly shaped by our colonial experience, and what Kubota (2020) describes as epistemological racism, with which we have never broken. My perspective of the relationship between individual, institutional, and epistemological racism and coloniality was greatly enhanced when I simultaneously audited two online graduate seminars about applied linguistics and decolonial movements, during the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2021, one through the University of Sergipe, with Dr. Doris Cristina Vicente da Silva Matos, and another through the University of Goiás, with Dr. Rosane Rocha Pessoa. The decolonial lens described by authors such as Santiago Castro-Gomez (2007), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), Walter Mignolo (2014), Aníbal Quijano (2000), Gabriela Veronelli (2016), and Catherine Walsh (2007) makes a variety of connections between European colonialism, its foundation in racism and white supremacy, and the inequalities and violences we face in our current society.

When I studied with Dr. da Silva Matos and Dr. Pessoa, I intensified the process of racializing myself as white. I started to confront my many privileges, which I had previously been aware of, but had avoided confronting. The intersectionality of my race, gender, national origin, and linguistic identity is an intersectionality of privileges that imbues me with unmerited legitimacy as I exist in the world and carry out my life journey. While I have often felt a sense of outrage at the lack of racial diversity in academic spaces, the fact that there are so few black university professors and English teachers in general now feels less like a temporary virus and more like a genetic problem related to our society's central nervous system (Santos, 2022). I am in the process of unearthing and recognizing my unmerited privileges and, as encouraged by Ribeiro (2019) through situating them, have started to take responsibility for them and actively work against them. In a world structured by racist epistemologies, trying to overcome racism is different from trying to be antiracist (Kubota, 2020). As Silvio Almeida (2019) notes, our society has a foundation set on structural racism, which means we perpetuate racism and inequality even when we intend not to. This means, I can no longer imagine a linguistic education that is neutral. If we are not actively working to change ourselves and change society in the direction of more social justice, we are actively working to generate and perpetuate inequalities.

A white Brazilian English professor and her ongoing racialization process

I grew up under the strong influence of my Italian immigrant ancestors, who believed that individual, hard work was a way to overcome poverty and lack of resources. Since an early age, I was audience to lectures on how laziness should be rebuked. Hardworking adults in my family, my parents themselves being part of them, were often pointed out as examples to be followed. However, as a student in a traditional Catholic school in my hometown, injustice was also part of what I used to study and discuss in curriculum disciplines such as History, Geography, and OSPB (Social and Political Brazilian Organization). In addition, as a Christian, I was also surrounded by biblical texts and sermons on the importance of justice and on how oppression over the poor, exploitation of workers, indifference to the weak, prejudice against the foreigner, corruption of justice and law for the benefit of rulers, among all other kinds of oppression (as one could infer), should be condemned. No clear emphasis was put on racial inequality, even though, as Monteiro (2023) and MacCaulley (2021) write, racism should be clearly pointed out as fiercely going against Christian principles and scriptures. The same authors criticize the way Christian churches and leaders have been complicit in the process of enslavement and oppression of black people in history throughout the world. In addition, along with Oden (2010), the authors also discuss the importance of the African continent to the history of Christianity.[3]

While social class inequality was a common theme in my family, church, and school life, race seemed to be non-existent or avoided; or at least that is how I see it when I look back. Of course, I had studied what used to be called "the discovery of Brazil" back then, and how colonizers enslaved and exploited black people from the African continent and indigenous people from the Americas. In 1983, I had a History/Geography book in my third year (I was 8 or 9 back then) where I read about mamelucos and cafuzos and how they participated in the formation of Brazil's population. I remember the pictures in that book with faces of men and women to represent black, white, and indigenous people, joined by symbols of addition, such as + and =, as in mathematics, to express the formula of how diversity of races came out from these people's relationships in Brazil. As far as I remember, the conflicts and subjugation inherent in these complex and often fatal racial relationships were never the subject of critical discussion. I believe we were dealing with the myth of the so-called racial democracy in Brazil, as suggested in Freyre's works (1933) and criticized by Munanga (2004):

> In Brazil, the racial democracy myth blocked, for many years, the national debate on affirmative action policies, and, in parallel, the myth of cultural syncretism or (national) mestizo culture also delayed the national debate on the implementation of multiculturalism in the national educational system (Munanga, 2004, p. 11).

I watched the movie *The Color Purple* (1985) for the first time in 1990, as it was playing late at night on our TV at home. I was 14 and I do not recall having been so heavily touched, as I was with the movie, by matters of race before. That was not a common conversation we used to have at home or school. But that movie afflicted and affected me. I found it striking that Celie, the main character, despite being so inhumanly treated, stands up as the most human person I could ever come across. Her wit, her love, her care for others, the way she writes to tell her stories, looks at things, moves on with life, overcomes abusers, grows emotionally and spiritually - all that really brings race up as a category I could no longer completely ignore, leaving me with the seeds of the question: who and where am I in relation to this? It would still take a few years before I started looking at the reality of race in society more seriously in my personal and professional life. It would still take me some time to understand myself as a person of race, for, as still happens, only brown and black skins would make someone a person of color (Pinheiro, 2023). My memories show me that racial inequality was rarely addressed in my experiences until I completed high school.

Little of my story fits within these pages, though. It would take plenty of time and space to build all my narratives and reflections here. However, to give it at least a fairly coherent overlook, I now jump to when I started studying matters of identity. My master's thesis focused on anxiety and language learning (Mastrella, 2002). I was worried, back then, about how students felt in the English classroom and what self-identified anxious students think about their whole learning process – their beliefs on errors, grammar, language difficulties, good/bad pronunciation, role of teachers and students, role of English in their lives, etc. When analyzed, the empirical material showed that beliefs on two aspects - errors and self - presented striking differences from other kinds of beliefs. That was why I started studying matters of "self" and, in that process, came across theories of identity (Mastrella-de-Andrade, 2007).

My doctoral studies, now almost two decades ago, focused on Brazilian teachers of English and their relationship with this language. Identity, then, was in the spotlight, for matters of race, gender, and class gained focus in the teachers' stories of my research, all situated in a context of coloniality. As Mignolo (2014, p. 63) puts it, an analysis of coloniality or "an analysis of the colonial matrix of power is always an analysis of ourselves". That was when my readings turned to critical Applied Linguistics (Pennycook, 2001), language, class, and race in English language teacher education. I started to comprehend how race was indissociably embedded into language learning and teaching in general and, given coloniality, how this reality must be even more profoundly considered.

Authors such as Kabenguele Munanga, Nilma Lino Gomes, Sueli Carneiro, Chimamanda Adichie, Valter R. Silvério, bell hooks, and Frantz Fanon, along with many others later on, became important names to me and my studies. Their work has been informing, inspiring, and transforming my ways of seeing myself as a language teacher and language teacher educator.

In the last few years, I have had some opportunities to be and work with Dr. Aparecida de Jesus Ferreira, Brazilian black language teacher educator and researcher in the area of critical racial literacy. As we chatted once during an event in the South of the country in 2016, I asked her opinion on white scholars researching and discussing race, racism, and English language education in Brazil. Of course, I was referring primarily to myself as someone interested in such studies. Kindly as always, in a way to welcome my question, she replied that she wished more white scholars discussed race in their work. However, she pointed out, white scholars must always be aware of their privilege and racism when they are speaking in academic places. This is a warning that is part of my racialization process: I cannot overlook my own whiteness – its full complexity and historical and political entanglements – if I wish to develop racial awareness in language education. I recognize that, while I try to fight racism in and through my praxiologies, I automatically benefit from it in my whiteness (Bento, 2022). Therefore, together with Avram here, I want to make my praxiologies auditable—that is, open myself up to critical reading by others. Risky as it may be, I believe this is a sine qua non condition in the ongoing process of building myself as an antiracist educator.

Our antiracist praxiologies within linguistic education

In this section, our efforts concentrate on describing and discussing how our life histories, as presented above, materialize into praxiologies, that is, ways to think and create curriculum in language teacher education. As for curriculum, we believe, along with Reis, Sussekind, and Lontra (2017), that it refers to daily creations of shared *practicedlived* knowledges, in endless chains of obedience and disobedience, silencing and struggle, joy and sadness. In this sense, our life histories, classroom work, and experience exchange are all entangled in the "complicated conversations" Pinar (2012) calls curriculum (Reis; Sussekind; Lontra, 2017, p. 137).

Avram's antiracist praxiologies

> My pedagogical practices have emerged from the mutually illuminating interplay of anticolonial, critical, and feminist pedagogies. This complex and unique blending of multiple perspectives has been an engaging and powerful standpoint from which to work. Expanding beyond boundaries, it has made it possible for me to imagine and enact pedagogical practices that engage directly both the concern for interrogating biases in curricula that reinscribe systems of domination (such as racism and sexism) while simultaneously providing new ways to teach diverse groups of students. (hooks, 1994, p. 10)

When we enforce standards, we are enforcing white supremacy (Rosa; Flores, 2017); there is a clear connection between idealized white linguistic norms and individual, institutional, and epistemological racism. On an individual level, a person's legitimacy is often established through expressing themselves in a way that conforms to others' expectations of "good" English, Portuguese, German, etc. Of course, the ideal is one established by a white community. On an institutional level, as we mentioned above, standardized tests are still used as one criterion for entrance into universities in the U.S. In Brazil, they are the sole criteria, and similar tests are used for civil service positions. Both of the previous examples of individual and institutional racism through linguicism are founded on epistemological racism (cf. Kubota, 2020).

So, what does that all mean for us as English professors at one of Brazil's flagship universities? As Suhanthie Motha (2020) asks, is an antiracist and decolonial applied linguistics possible? For us, an important step is (re)thinking what language is. Is language just rules, and linguistic education just learning to obey them? Perceiving language education not as a process of conformity, but one of negotiation, creativity, performance, and disposition to difference (Canagarajah, 2013) radically changes almost every aspect of what we do, while also better expressing who we want to become. We have an institutional role and responsibilities to fulfill, but are blessed with the autonomy, through the Brazilian Law of Educational Directives and Bases (Lei nº 9.394/96), to not have administrators hovering over us and enforcing what and how we "teach"[4]. This allows us to create the curriculum *with* students through their interests and life projects.

In recent years, in language classes, this has meant working with projects and themes that students choose. During the semester, they carry out multimodal readings about their individual topics, discuss them with their classmates and write about them. The linguistic effort depends on them. What words or phrases were they not able to understand? What ideas did they have difficulty expressing in writing? What resources and strategies did they use to overcome those challenges? The role of members of the group, including me, is to collaborate and ask for clarification when we do not understand another member of the group. I draw from Freire (1994) and hooks (1994) to cultivate my praxiologies:

> Agendas had to be flexible, had to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction. Students had to be seen in their particularity as individuals (I drew on the strategies my grade school teachers used to get to know us) and interacted with them according to their needs (here Freire was useful). (hooks, 1994, p. 7)

It cannot be overstated how important it is to me that the whole process be directly related to students' goals and desires. This means being flexible in relation to changes in direction their projects might take as they further delve into the process. It also means reflecting with the group about how my way of "teaching" is itself directly related to my own life project.

In another excerpt, hooks (1994) inspires and offers a model for generating excitement about the educational experience through the way we value and believe in students' life projects, collaborate with them and shake up their expectation of a teacher-centered educational experience:

> As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence. Since the vast majority of students learn through conservative, traditional educational practices and concern themselves only with the presence of the professor, any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged. That insistence cannot be simply stated. It has to be demonstrated through pedagogical practices. To begin, the professor must genuinely value everyone's presence. There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes. These contributions are resources. Used constructively they enhance the capacity of any class to create an open learning community. (hooks, 1994, p. 8)

In contrast to most of our own education, we focus on not thinking of our institutional role as being the person who knows what students should know and *passing* it to them in what Freire (1970) describes as the banking model of education. For us, teaching to transgress involves changing our stance in relation to students, as we attempt to flatten the hierarchy. An important step in this process is not judging them and not judging their linguistic repertoires. Inherent in the act of judging is the white supremacist stance of superiority and arrogance (cf. Flores and Rosa, 2015).

During Avram's classes, the group reads the works of racialized authors, such as Amy Tan (1990), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), and Jamila Lyiscott (2014), who discuss their linguistic identities in relation to the types of discrimination they have faced and whose English repertoires vary from idealized standard forms. The intent is to value their experience, their ways of knowing, and their linguistic repertoires as intellectual and linguistic models.

Antiracism education in Mariana's praxiologies

As Angela Davis writes, "it is not enough to be non-racist; we must be antiracist" (Pinheiro, 2023, p. 40). I assume, then, together with Ribeiro (2019), that we, white people, are racist, though it's often too uncomfortable to admit it. Therefore, we argue here that being antiracist is context-dependent. It is not a pre-given, fixed formula you simply apply to all kinds of situations. As we narrate our antiracist praxiologies, we are not dictating ways of doing, but rather showing and discussing how we have tried to build antiracism in our contexts, with the people we live and work with. As already admitted, we are aware of the risk of criticism this text is subject to. Racism is not always so clear to identify. Unfortunately, as racism works unconsciously as well (Ribeiro, 2019), at times we

may identify racist practices that, when conscious, we would not like to have at all. Nevertheless, we must face the racism that exists both within and around us and work towards the appreciation of racial difference in our society in order to promote justice and equity.

The year was 2015. I was in charge of an English class, with 26 student-teachers in the first semester of their English major. I prepared my class based on getting to know the students – their everyday life, their histories, their reasons for choosing a teaching career, and their relationship with the English language. I was ready to propose pair and group discussions on such topics and, on top of that, gather information to collectively think over what we wanted and needed to study during those months. As traditionally happens, I got into class a few minutes earlier to arrange the seats in a semicircle, to have students facing each other and hopefully establish more communication.

I have been working in this institution since 2009. Back then, I remember teaching groups where people were mostly white, upper-middle-class students, who expressed their interests in doing the English major just as a way to get a higher education degree, a springboard for other better paid careers as public servants in Brazil. How do I know that? I have the habit of writing down in my notebooks students' names, ages, where they live, where they are from, where and how they have learned their English, and what they are doing that major for. From answers to those questions, I can try and picture basic facts about some matters of race and class among my students. More than half of the students back then had learned their English in private institutes, which are commonly expensive in Brazil, and did not really long for becoming teachers.

As discussed by Gissele Alves (2021), the quota system for admission to Brazilian federal institutions, according to Law n. 12.711/2012, has been democratizing access to public universities, mine being one of them. The policy reserves at least 50% of its places for students from public schools and 20% specifically for black students in undergraduate courses. That is why I saw, on that first day, more color in the group I was about to meet. I cannot really affirm how the students saw themselves, but I would identify almost half of the class as black.

I started by introducing myself and telling them about my history as a teacher and learner, with a few slides showing photographs of my trajectory. After that, I asked them to introduce themselves, mentioning information such as name, age, where they were from, where they lived, why they chose the English Major, and what they expected for the semester.

The first student to speak was a friendly, white young girl, who answered with information as asked and took some time to describe her English learning history in a well-known private institution in Brasília, followed up by her travels to do courses in two different English-speaking countries. What followed, then, puzzled me at first and accounted for things later on. The next student to talk started by saying he did not speak English and asked for permission to speak in Portuguese, to which of course I replied positively. I had always wanted to make my classes inclusive to all kinds of levels and needs of assistance, as I discuss in Mastrella-de-

Andrade (2011). One by one, the next five or six students introduced themselves in Portuguese, claiming they did not know any English. I found it a bit strange, for freshmen/women, even though they may have difficulties, are usually able to introduce themselves in English very well. For the rest of the class, however, what followed was a sequence of pair work activities requesting a lot of conversation and sharing of feelings and attitudes towards English teaching and learning experiences, during which I could notice those very same students who claimed not to know any English using this language in more relaxed conversations with their peers.

My studies on identity and coloniality spoke up at that time. Was I having black students feeling intimidated in my class? By whom or what? By that white classmate who had reported on all her privileged learning experience? Yes, that was my first guess; not the only and last one, though. My "geo-political and body-political" (Grosfoguel, 2011, p. 5) place of enunciation was at play, as inevitable. I myself was a white, blond, green-eyed professor facing the students at the front of the classroom, writing on the board, showing slides, sharing my experiences, and addressing them all in English right from the beginning.

As I question in Mastrella-de-Andrade (2007), which bodies can legitimately speak English? I started wondering who else would speak in class that semester. Which voices should our classes echo? How could we encourage each other to speak up with the English we had, no matter what, aware that language standards are social constructions that bring about oppression and silencing (Mastrella-de-Andrade, 2011)?

I reorganized the entire program that semester in order to include many more black intellectuals and authors, speakers, and English-speaking people in general so that students would feel represented and gain awareness of how intensely present different repertoires (Blommaert; Backus, 2011) of English are in different black communities around the world. Thus, our program included discussing about being articulate in English, according to Jamila Lyscott; we watched Nigerian Chimamanda Adichie's talk on the dangers of a single story; we discussed Paulo Freire's video on accent as a matter of class in society (and we turned to race to make the discussion more critical and relevant in coloniality); we watched videos about Nobel Peace Prize Winner Wangari Maathai and her work and fight to rebuild green areas and rivers in Kenya; we also read and watched videos on the so-called imposter syndrome, which silences us in social life, critically adding how matters of race and gender are inseparable from it if one wants to have a full account of how things work in Brazilian society.

We had two important in-person visits that semester. The first one was the ambassador of Trinidad and Tobago, an English-speaking country often neglected as such, who kindly agreed to both visit us at the university with his staff and receive us at the Embassy as guests, to present and discuss their country's history, culture, and language. The second one was the ambassador of Nigeria, another English-speaking country, and part of his staff, who visited us in class and also brought in discussions on their history and culture.

As for students' productions, they were supposed to do lots of different tasks related to the materials' vocabulary and grammar, besides discussing in groups how they experienced each of those issues in their own learning and teaching trajectory. By the end, they were supposed to present a multimodal personal account (with songs, photos, illustrations, gifs etc.) of how the class discussions and materials touched and brought about changes in their way of understanding and feeling their relationship with English.

Most of the students reported feeling more open then to take risks using their English in and out of class, as they were more critically aware of their right to speak, no matter how others would judge their language. For this text, I bring a short transcription of part of a black young student's presentation, as she said it at the end of her talk that semester:

> At first, I did not notice or understand why the professor was bringing those topics for us to study. I thought they were too repetitive. But then, little by little, I found out that… I think, I'm not sure… but I think that she wanted to give us courage. She wanted us to have courage to speak, to listen, to do things in English. For me, it is difficult to have this courage because I like when people admire me, not when they criticize me. But I understand now that I have to face it. I have to speak for myself, because the professor and many people can give me these ideas, but who is going to make it happen? Only me. It's me indeed. So, I have to be courageous now. And I am beginning. Every day I am beginning to take more courage to use my English. And to believe in my English. I was born in a poor, black family from Santa Maria [a peripheral neighborhood]. And I am here. So, please, do not say I am not courageous. I am. And I can [be] more.

Nobody can give anyone courage. Courage is not something that is given. The word courage, actually, was not really part of our discussions back then. However, that was her comprehension of it. What really strikes me from her talk is that she was aware that, even though she thought *I* wanted to give them courage, *she* saw *herself* as a person of courage. Maybe that is why such a concept struck up in her comprehension of the whole process.

As I write, I feel that changing the curriculum is certainly relevant, but it is not enough, given the depth and extent of racism in Brazilian society and in our minds, bodies, and souls. There is much more to be done, further steps to be taken, and different questions to be asked concerning doing antiracist education. I feel most decisions still lay in my hands that semester. How can we make not only the curriculum, but also our methodological options, antiracist, learning from black intellectual traditions and communities? How can we democratize methodological decision-making in teacher education, changing not only the content, but also pedagogical practices and leadership dynamics in class in order to foster a more racially equitable distribution of power?

Final words: problematizing our process of racialization in light of our life projects as university English professors

> More than ever before in the recent history of this nation, educators are compelled to confront the biases that have shaped teaching practices in our society and to create new ways of knowing, different strategies for the sharing of knowledge. (hooks, 1994, p. 12)

What do we all gain from this? What do we lose? Both bell hooks (1994) in the United States and Djamila Ribeiro (2019) in Brazil explore how – in their personal experiences and beyond – our formal education consistently presents whiteness as not only the norm and neutral, but also superior. Everyone else is racialized, othered, and inferiorized. Even attempts at multiculturalism that try to include multiracial images or examples, but do not confront inequalities, fall into this trap (Kubota, 2004). How can we not only avoid this but work against it as language teachers? Are we presenting "speaking white" as the norm?

In some cases, it is a matter of becoming aware of nuances, such as changing how we refer to those enslaved as such rather than as slaves. The former emphasizes that people enslaved other people, whereas the latter implies a natural or implicit state of being (Ribeiro, 2019). How much can such a change in individual stance change a society? Not as much, and not as fast, as we would like, but we must persist, for the alternative is to continue to exacerbate racial inequality. We are not alone, though. Windle and Muniz (2018) show how highlighting issues of race in a language teacher education program encouraged students to cultivate and resignify their racial identities while also resisting dominant racial positioning and discourses in Brazil.

In many cases, we think and feel that our antiracist engagement cannot do without sensitivity and responsiveness to the details embedded in our linguistic and sociocultural repertoires. We recognize the privileges that our ways of speaking—and especially our white bodies—afford us, and we strive to step back from positions of power so that others may step into them.

With the constant rise of movements that promote the standardization of human beings and the erasure of diversity, we recognize the need to foster conversations about the role of language in creating realities and discrimination, but, likewise, a society where all people may have a space within equitable relationships. Since 1988, Brazil has had a Constitution that guarantees equal rights for all; however, more than four centuries of denying these rights to non-white people cannot be undone by legal reform alone.

As educators, we have learned that we do not and cannot have a recipe. It is all about interrogating, understanding, and feeling the contexts where we are and

the kinds of antiracist answers we are supposed to construct with the ones around us in the different circumstances we face along the journey. Collectively, however, we need a broader shift in worldviews and in sociopolitical, cultural, and identity-based relations. We need collective movements to ensure that language education and teacher education in the university—refusing to be yet another space for the imposition of whiteness—actively contribute to the transition Sussekind and Coube (2020) call from university to pluriversity.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT: Datasets related to this research will be available upon contact with the corresponding author.

End notes

1. While we have seen the spelling praxeologies and praxiologies in different texts, we choose to use the latter because it harmonizes with the spelling in Brazilian Portuguese, praxiologias.
2. According to the 2023 Brazilian Higher Education Census, 21% of university professors identified themselves as black or mixed-race (2.9% black and 18.1% mixed race) (Fiquem, 2024). Meanwhile, 55% of the overall population identified as black or mixed-race (10.3% black and 45.2% mixed race) (IBGE, 2025). In the same year, 67% of housekeepers were black or mixed race (Leão; Lirio, 2024).
3. Theologian Thomas Oden (2010) has argued that Africa played a decisive role in constructing early Christian thought. His central thesis is that the development of Christian culture and doctrine was influenced by African intelectual and spiritual contributions, especially from places like Egypt, Libya, and Ethiopia. For more on this, see: ODEN, T. (2010). How Africa shaped the Christian mind: Redescovering the African seedbed of Western Christianity. IVP Academic.
4. It is important to point out that this autonomy is not enjoyed equally across educational contexts in Brazil.

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