

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: EPISTEMOLOGIES AND PRAXIS

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While reflecting on the relation between language and power, hooks (1994) affirms that “like desire, language disrupts, refuses to be contained within boundaries. It speaks itself against our will, in words and thoughts that intrude, even violate the most private spaces of mind and body” (p. 167). In this special issue, titled “English language education for social justice: epistemologies and praxis”, we subscribe to the understanding that language is not only a communicative tool used for daily interactions – it is ideologically-loaded and thus may be either a site for the perpetuation of hegemony or the locus for emancipatory practices. The same is true for the educational process – according to Freire (1996), teaching is inherently political inasmuch as our pedagogical practices have real effects in society. We argue, therefore, that as language educators and scholars, we must be committed to the construction of a fairer world.

When it comes to English language education more specifically, we should not ignore the colonial history of the language as well as the ways in which it is often co-opted for neoliberal purposes or for the promotion of monolingual (and also colonial and racist) policies in contemporary society (Chang-Bacon et al., 2021; Silva, Farias & Macedo, 2025). At the same time, if we aim at social change – which is, for Freire (2023), the focus of critical pedagogy –, we should also

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consider the ways in which the so-called “language of the oppressor” (Rich, 2016) may be used to disrupt boundaries, recognizing knowledge and practices that, from a positivist perspective, have been deemed as inferior or ignorant. In that sense, critical language education is a perspective that not only questions society’s oppressive structures, but also creates the conditions for social change to happen. It is based on the freirean idea that the development of critical consciousness – or *conscientização* – enables us to understand our position in the world (and the ways in which we are constricted by society’s norms and structures) so as to engage in resistance and promote change.

Praxis (that is, the relation between theory and practice which allows for reflection and action – understood here as symbiotic rather than as binaries) must be the basis of a critical English language education project. That is why the studies herein presented focus on epistemologies and praxis for the teaching and learning of English with a focus on social justice. Drawing on different critical perspectives (e.g. translanguaging, multiliteracies, antiracism, peace communication, critical language pedagogy), the articles in this issue not only discuss possibilities for critical English language education, but also demonstrate the ways in which it has been enacted in various contexts. We would like to highlight that, since the great majority of studies are from scholars located in the Global South, the issue can also be seen as a statement for the work being done from the margins, by the margins and for the margins. While the field of English language education is still dominated by theories imported from the Global North, the articles of this issue are a representation of the need to recuperate Southern epistemologies and to question the coloniality embedded in scientific production and dissemination.

The first seven articles of the issue unveil significant aspects of key concepts in critical language education, such as translanguaging, multiliteracies, antiracist education, and others. In the first article, the authors Rafael Gomes Rosa, Eduardo Sampaio, Norberto Niclotti Catuci, Rafaela Potrich and Anamaria Welp discuss climate justice as an important component of critical language education. They emphasize how principles from the translanguaging learning movement framework (TLMF) can be used pedagogically so as to promote socially just language education focusing on environmental issues. Michele El kadri and Antonieta Megale, the authors of the second article, also discuss translanguaging as a decolonial tool in the context of bilingual education in Brazil. They claim that in order to promote bilingual education initiatives that are actually critical and inclusive, it is necessary to develop materials and practices that question normative understandings of language and society.

The third paper, authored by Alessandra Coutinho Fernandes, discusses the theory of multiliteracies and its connection to educational and social justice. For her, the perspective of multiliteracies can be transformative to the extent that it values students’ identities and subjectivities. In the fourth article, Kleber Aparecido da Silva and Lauro Sérgio Machado Pereira draw on Freire to discuss

possibilities for an antiracist critical language education. The concept of hope (or *esperança*) is presented as key for the praxis of emancipatory language education that foregrounds the knowledge and the voices of historically oppressed subjects.

The fifth article is written by Ana Paula Martinez Duboc and Gabrielle Gilio and it problematizes how neoliberal and colonial understandings of language education have been implemented in the State of São Paulo. The authors argue that the use of platforms for language learning in the basic education system can actually further social inequalities. In the following piece, Fernanda Caiado da Costa Ferreira, Viviane Pires Viana Silvestre, Barbra Sabota and Laryssa Paulino de Queiroz Sousa investigate the language ideologies of different English language teacher educators in Brazil. The study discusses the competing – and perhaps overlapping – discourses of traditional and critical language education, signaling the challenges but also the possibilities for critical language teacher education in the country. Finally, in the seventh article, Marianna Rosa Mastrella and Avram Stanley Brum reflect on their trajectories as critical language teacher educators and problematize whiteness as the norm. As white scholars, they highlight the importance of acknowledging privileges and recognizing their role in the promotion of antiracist language education.

Perhaps one of the highlights of this Special Issue is its connection to real classrooms, which can be directly seen in the next five articles we would like to present. In different and unique ways, they all reflect on examples of pedagogical materials and/or classroom interventions. In their text, Camila Alvares Pasquetti, Maristela Campos and Nadia Karina Ruhmke-Ramos depart from their experiences as English teachers dealing with ethnic-racial relations in the high school context. Their article not only describes activities and projects used to promote critical understandings of race in language teaching, but also provides insights on the importance of reflecting upon students' contexts and needs from a critical perspective. Moreover, Kellita do Carmo Araujo and Arioaldo Lopes Pereira analyze, in their piece, an English language textbook widely used in Brazilian public schools. The authors discuss the possibilities presented by the book for the promotion of critical interculturality with a focus on ethnic-racial issues. In a similar vein, Gildete Cecilia Neri Santos Teles and Layenne Humberto de Oliveira analyze another English textbook and its potentialities for promoting a decolonial perspective in language teaching and learning. The authors conclude that teachers' agency is pivotal to move beyond the propositions of the book, highlighting thus the need for reflection and continued educational opportunities. Finally, the eleventh article of the issue, written by Fernanda Costa da Silva Machado, Mergenfel A. Vaz Ferreira and Philip Börjesson, can be seen as complementary to the argument developed by the previous text. While Teles and Oliveira discussed the relevance of teachers' agency in developing their own additional language teaching materials, Machado, Ferreira and Börjesson present and discuss a sample pedagogical unit that aims to promote a decolonial perspective in English classes by discussing cultural stereotypes in the context of basic education.

The next three articles of this issue also discuss pedagogical possibilities for critical language education in school grounds – more specifically, they depart from the context of basic and technological education and/or English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The piece by Rosane Rocha Pessoa and Paula Graciano Pereira refers to a study that took place in a Brazilian Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology and dwells on the experience of a transgender and autistic student who confronted the colonialities of being, knowledge, ability, and gender in the English classroom. The authors highlight that the experience discussed signals for the relevance of decolonial education that creates the conditions for students to speak, act, and exist beyond imposed structures. In the following article, Tiago Pellim questions the hierarchies of knowledge in schools, highlighting that English, in the context of technological education in Brazil, is commonly perceived as a tool that is required in technical training. The author discusses data from questionnaires and class recordings to propose a critical-translingual lens in (re)thinking English language teaching in this context. Finally, the article by V. K. Karthika presents data from an action research conducted in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom in India. The study attempted to integrate Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into the ESP curriculum as a way to promote critical communication and emotional intelligence.

Other two articles of this issue that investigate possibilities for critical language education in real classrooms are focused on childhood and language education. The first one, by Juliana Reichert Assunção Tonelli and Helena Vitalina Selbach, deals with the possibilities for promoting social justice while teaching English in schools with young learners. The authors present and analyze data from meetings and questionnaires carried out with school teachers to propose teaching praxiologies that are critically oriented. In a similar trend, Patrícia Helena da Silva Costa analyzes a teaching unit that was developed for a politically engaged online language education project with children whose ages ranged from 8 to 11. The study calls attention to English language instruction that promotes critical reflection and citizenship.

Taking an alternative turn, the next two articles that compose this issue discuss artistic interventions as a venue for social transformation. The first one, by Tallyssa Sirino, discusses possibilities for decolonial multiliteracies practices while analyzing the music video “The Body Electric” by the band Hurray for the Riff Raff. Instead of proposing a teaching unit, the author takes a less common path, using her analysis to illustrate pedagogical alternatives for a decolonial and dialogical language education. In the second piece, written by one of the editors of this issue, Graham V. Crookes, in collaboration with Alessia Cogo, the authors draw on Transformative Language Learning and Teaching to highlight the emancipatory (transformative) use of literature in English as a Lingua Franca classes. By presenting sample activities, the authors illustrate and discuss how emotions and posthumanist perspectives may allow for transformative language pedagogy.

Ultimately, the last three articles that we are also proud to introduce as part of this issue make use of specific academic genres or methodologies to discuss epistemologies and praxis in critical language education. The piece authored by Irando Alves Martins Neto consists of a systematic review in which 143 articles that discuss critical English language education in Brazil are analyzed. The review connects the relevance of the field in the Brazilian context to the rise of Critical Applied Linguistics while also pointing out the need for more systematic teaching studies. The following text, written by Thaynara da Luz Jenuario Quadros and Hanna Kivistö de Souza, presents a review of the book “Social Justice, Decoloniality, and Southern Epistemologies within Language Education: Theories, Knowledges, and Practices on Tesol from Brazil”, edited by Vander Tavares and published in 2023. In it, the authors critically analyze the chapters of the book, highlighting its contributions to a Global South perspective in the field of English language teaching. In the last piece of this issue, two of the editors, Leonardo da Silva and Priscila Fabiane Farias, present a dialogical text in which they interview Dr. Yecid Ortega, a critical language educator and scholar, who argues in favor of pluriversal language education for the promotion of social justice.

Based on the collection of manuscripts presented, it is our belief that this issue, which attempts to connect theory and practice through the several proposed discussions, can be a relevant source of reflection and of the promotion of critical dialogue among researchers, teachers and student-teachers interested in critical English language education. Since critical language education is a collective project that questions neoliberal individuality, we would like to express our gratitude to all those involved in the construction of this special issue: the several authors who represent a diversity of institutions, Brazilian states and even countries; the numerous reviewers, who kindly accepted to read and provide feedback on the submitted articles; and the entire editorial team of *Ilha do Desterro*, who gave us the support needed for this dossier to come to life. It is our hope that this issue contributes to enhancing dialogue among critical language educators, while informing research and practice in a meaningful manner towards promoting social justice.

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