

Challenges of a decolonial undertaking in teacher education

Desafios de uma iniciativa decolonial na formação docente

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Abstract: As Brazilian university teachers, we have taken part in some courses aimed at the professional development of in-service English teachers. However, inspired by decolonial thinking, we have seen them as reproducing logics of coloniality, an epistemological frame which hierarchizes human beings socially, ontologically and epistemically. Thus, in an attempt to fight the coloniality and power established between universities and schools, in 2016, we set up a study group – a space where we, English teachers in Goiás, could talk about our profession. Our aim in this interpretive study is to discuss initial challenges of this decolonial undertaking. We do so by focusing on attendance and agency. The reflections made in this article indicate that our expectation to expand our praxis was achieved somehow, but we consider it was jeopardized due to poor attendance and lack of agency. We conclude with some following moves to challenge coloniality in educational projects.

Key-words: decolonial thinking, study group, teacher education.

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Resumo: Em nossa carreira de professoras universitárias brasileiras, temos participado de alguns cursos de formação continuada de professoras/es de inglês. Entretanto, inspiradas pelo pensamento decolonial, nos vemos reproduzindo lógicas de colonialidade, um quadro epistemológico que hierarquiza os seres humanos social, ontológica e epistemicamente. Assim, na tentativa de combater a colonialidade e o poder estabelecidos entre as universidades e as escolas, em 2016, criamos um grupo de estudo – um espaço onde nós, professoras/es de inglês em Goiás, pudéssemos conversar sobre nossa profissão. Nosso objetivo neste estudo interpretativo é discutir os desafios dessa iniciativa decolonial, enfocando assiduidade e agência. As reflexões feitas neste artigo indicam que a expectativa de ampliar nossa práxis foi alcançada de alguma forma, embora tenha sido comprometida devido à baixa frequência e à falta de agência. Concluímos com alguns movimentos para desafiar a colonialidade em projetos educacionais.

Palavras-chave: formação docente, grupo de estudo, pensamento decolonial.

Son estas cadenas puestas por las estructuras y sistemas del poder y saber coloniales, y aún mantenidas y reproducidas por la institución educativa, las que dirigen y organizan las maneras tanto de pensar como de ver el mundo.
(Walsh, 2007, p. 27)

Decolonial thinking^{4,5}

GEPLIGO⁶. This is the name of a study group created to discuss English teaching in Goiás, a Midwest state of Brazil. Grounded on “de-colonial⁷ thinking” (Mignolo, 2009a, p. 4), we have been trying to move away from the traditional model of in-service teacher education courses. These courses are normally offered by university teachers, seen as producers of knowledge, and attended by school teachers, seen as appliers of that knowledge. In our career as Brazilian university teachers, we have taken part in some of these courses aimed at the professional development of in-service English teachers, but we have seen them as reproducing this logic of coloniality and, thus, we have been trying to work with the perspective of de-colonial thinking, the task of which is “the unveiling of epistemic silences of Western epistemology and affirming the epistemic rights of the racially devalued” (Mignolo, 2009a, p. 4). Grosfoguel (2010, p. 479) also defends that we decolonize Western epistemology,

⁴ This study is part of the “*Projeto Nacional de Letramentos: Linguagem Cultura, Educação e Tecnologia*” [National Project on Literacies: Language, Culture, Education and Technology], led by W. Monte Mor and L. M. T. Menezes de Souza from University of São Paulo (USP), and registered in the CNPq (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development) Research Groups Directory (Mor and Souza, 2016).

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⁶ An acronym for *Grupo de estudos de professoras/es de língua inglesa de Goiás* [English language teachers of Goiás study group].

⁷ In this text, we keep the terms the way they are used by the authors: “de-colonial”, “decolonial”, “descolonizing”, though our option is for “decolonial”. However, we agree with Walsh (2009), who distinguishes “descolonize” from “decolonize”, as we do not intend to unmake or revert the colonial; but rather to provoke a continuous positioning of transgression and insurgency. Thus, “decolonial” implies continuous struggle, in which we can identify and make visible spaces of alternative constructions.

Taking seriously the subaltern side of the colonial difference: the side of the periphery, of workers, of women, of racialized/colonized individuals, of homosexuals/lesbians, and of the anti-systemic movements that participate in the process of knowledge production.⁸

According to Mignolo (2009b), the logic of coloniality was structured during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and it changed hands, was transformed and adapted to the new circumstances by means of managing and controlling four interrelated domains: authority, economy, people (subjectivity, gender, sexuality) and knowledge. From 1500 to approximately 1750, it was in the hands of Spain and Portugal; from 1750 to 1945, of England, France and Germany; from 1945 to 2000, of the United States; and since then it has been in the hands of a polycentric world interconnected by the same type of economy. Mignolo (2009b, p. 42, emphasis in original) argues that *coloniality*, which is “short hand for ‘colonial matrix (or order) of power’”, constitutes “the hidden and darker side of modernity”, and is founded on colonial difference:

The colonial difference operates by converting differences into values and establishing a hierarchy of human beings ontologically and epistemically. Ontologically, it is assumed that there are inferior human beings. Epistemically, it is assumed that inferior human beings are rational and aesthetically deficient. (Mignolo, 2009b, p. 46)

To Lander (2005), the worldview that provides the foundational assumptions of the whole edifice of modern social knowledge is based on the naturalization of the free market social organization. Its superiority, as well as the superiority of its countries, culture, history, and race,

Is demonstrated both by the conquest and submission of the other peoples of the world and by the historical “overcoming” of earlier forms of social organization, once the multiple forms of resistance were overcome and the full hegemony of the liberal organization of life was established in Europe [...]. This worldview has as its central axis the idea of modernity, a notion that captures four basic dimensions: 1) the universal vision of history associated with the idea of progress (from which the classification and hierarchy of all peoples, continents, and historical experiences); 2) the “naturalization” of both social relations and the “human nature” of liberal-capitalist society; 3) the naturalization or ontologization of the multiple separations characteristic of that society; and 4) the necessary superiority of the knowledge that this society produces (“science”) in relation to all other knowledge. (Lander, 2005, p. 13, emphasis in original)

This superiority of knowledge is clearly expressed by the fact that the canons of thought in all of the academic disciplines of the Westernized university have been produced only by Western males of five countries (France, England, Germany, Italy and the USA) since the end of the 18th century (Grosfoguel, 2013). To this author, Black, Red, Yellow and even the Iberian people were excluded from the Westernized university knowledge structures on the grounds that they lacked the Kantian anthropological – and racist – idea of *rationality*. The author argues that, “after 500 years of coloniality of knowledge there is no cultural nor epistemic tradition in an absolute sense outside to Eurocentered

⁸This and other extracts of texts originally written in Portuguese or Spanish were translated into English by us.

modernity” (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 87), but there are non-Western epistemic perspectives that go beyond Eurocentred modernity, providing hope and possibility for a Transmodern world, where there is epistemic diversity. Still according to Grosfoguel (2013, p. 88), it is from the diverse traditions of the Global South “that we can build projects that will take different ideas and institutions appropriated by Eurocentred modernity and to decolonize them in different directions”.

Tuned with Mignolo (2014), we consider that universities can play a crucial role in the building of decolonial futures, mainly because the university is a fundamental institution “in the construction and management of the coloniality of knowledge” (Mignolo, 2014, p. 63) since it has been reaffirmed as the only locus of knowledge production excluding all other forms of knowing. Besides, we have been inspired by the idea that there are no “universal solutions where one defines for the rest what ‘the solution’ is” (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 88, emphasis in original), and by the argument that transmodernity calls for a pluriverse of solutions where “the many defines for the many” (Dussel, 2008 *apud* Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 88). Thus, instead of a teacher education course, in the second semester of 2016, we set up a study group, where English teachers could talk about our profession and make decisions in the group. Besides having four-hour meetings once a month, we set up a virtual Google Group. In 2016 and 2017, we had twelve face-to-face meetings and nineteen English teachers attended at least one of them. By the end of 2017, forty members were registered at the virtual Google Group, composed by teachers who could not attend the face-to-face meetings and the ones who could. Reports on the face-to-face meetings, together with texts and activities, were posted in the virtual group.

By creating the group, we intended to assume, with conviction and commitment, “a political, epistemic and ethical responsibility that is directed towards action and intervention, understood not as an individual but as a collective act” (Walsh, 2007, p. 27). Hence, our aim in this text is to discuss initial challenges of this decolonial undertaking, as we wonder whether we are helping to maintain or to confront dominant structures of knowledge and power (Walsh, 2007). To reach this aim, we will focus on two themes, *attendance* and *agency*, the last being understood as the engagement with the activities and with decisions concerning the study group. Though we generated materials such as profile questionnaires, assessment questionnaires and reflective sessions, only the three of us participated in all of them. Thus, instead of making use of these empirical materials systematically, we have chosen to make a first general reflection on the challenges of this experience, which we consider to be a decolonial undertaking.

Decoloniality in recent language and literature studies

Walsh (2007, p. 28, emphasis in original) affirms that knowledge “has value, color and place ‘of origin’”, which, in Latin America, is evident “in the maintenance of Eurocentrism as the only or at least the most hegemonic dominant perspective of knowledge”. She also affirms that this perspective is present “in universities, schools, and colleges, which underline Euro-American intellectual production as ‘science’ and universal knowledge, relegating the thinking of the south to the status of ‘localized knowledge’” (Walsh, 2007, p. 28, emphasis in original).

Eurocentrism was firstly challenged in English Language Teaching (ELT) in the 1990s. According to Kumaravadivelu (2016, p. 70),

The 1990s witnessed pioneering contributions by Phillipson (1992), who foregrounded the imperialistic nature of ELT as a field; by Pennycook (1998), who historicized the colonial character that still adheres to it; and by Canagarajah (1999), who documented the English language learners' resistance to it.

Since then, there have been impressive volume and variety of research and publications on the native speaker/non-native speaker inequity, but, to Kumaravadivelu (2016), they have not been able to reshape ELT in a significant way. Thus, the author is uncompromising in his defense of the fight against the nonnative speaker subalternity. His paper is grounded on insights from the works of Gramsci (1971) on hegemony and subalternity, and Mignolo (2010) on decoloniality. Kumaravadivelu (2016, p. 72-73, emphasis in original) argues that “the hegemonic forces in our field keep themselves ‘alive and kicking’ through various aspects of English language education: curricular plans, materials design, teaching methods, standardized tests, and teacher preparation”, and highlights that “it is primarily through center-based methods and center-produced materials that the marginality of the majority is managed and maintained. They are the engine that propels the hegemonic power structure” (Kumaravadivelu, 2016, p. 73).

In view of that, he contends that if this subaltern community “wishes to effectively disrupt the hegemonic power structure, the only option open to it is a decolonial option which demands result-oriented action, not just ‘intellectual elaboration’” (Kumaravadivelu, 2016, p. 66, emphasis in original). Based on Mignolo (2010), the author encourages subalterns to think and, especially, act otherwise and draw a framework for strategic plans – which Mignolo (2010) calls *a grammar of decoloniality* – deriving from their own lived experiences and local contexts.

To Kumaravadivelu (2016), the contours of such a framework should involve: 1) designing context-specific instructional strategies; 2) preparing teaching materials that are suited to the goals and objectives of learning and teaching in a specific context and responsive to the instructional strategies designed by local professionals; 3) restructuring teacher education programs so that prospective teachers can develop the knowledge, skill, and disposition necessary to become producers of pedagogic knowledge and pedagogic materials; 4) doing proactive research with a view to paying attention to the local exigencies of learning and teaching, identifying researchable questions, producing original knowledge, and subjecting it to further verification. He concludes by stating: “only a collective, concerted, and coordinated set of actions carries the potential to shake the foundation of the hegemonic power structure and move the subaltern community forward” (Kumaravadivelu, 2016, p. 66).

Influenced by decolonial and postcolonial authors, some Brazilian scholars from the areas of Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, and Literature have been reflecting on the need to search for epistemic diversity (Borelli, 2018; Carbonieri, 2016a, 2016b; Jordão, 2014, 2016; Fabrício, 2017; Pessoa and Hoelzle, 2017; Severo, 2017; Silvestre, 2016; Zolin-Vesz, 2016), as hierarchies are still very strong in our field. For example, in the area of Teacher Education, hierarchy exists between university profes-

sors (“who have scientific knowledge”) and student teachers (“who, at best, have common sense”), and between university professors and school teachers (“who have practical knowledge”); in the area of Language Teaching, between teachers and students, native speakers and non-native speakers, standard language and other “varieties”, center-based methods and local methods, center-produced materials and local material; and in the area of Literature, between the Western literary canon and marginalized writing.

In the area of Literature, Carbonieri (2016a) discusses how she has been descolonizing the teaching of English language literatures in an undergraduate course of *Letras*. Being troubled by the fact that the syllabus of literature disciplines she taught were predominantly composed by canonical works, she proposes to think less in terms of literary movements organized chronologically and more in terms of contemporary matters, such as race, ethnicity, culture, gender, citizenship, oppression, and resistance. She questions whether we have been reinforcing a Eurocentric and elitist view of the world in our lessons and defends that “the classroom of English language literatures should be a compelling space for the experience of difference and alterity and for the questioning of any cultural and social hierarchies” (Carbonieri, 2016a, p. 128). She then suggests that literary works produced in peripheral contexts or by marginalized groups should take an important part in the curriculum of literature disciplines. In this sense, Carbonieri (2016a) exemplifies how she puts students in contact with different forms of spirituality in order to strengthen religious tolerance and fight spiritual hierarchy by focusing, for instance, on the novels like *Things fall apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958). In another article, she examines how the condition of transgenerity is represented in the book *Albert Nobbs* by George Moore (2011) and argues that Moore succeeds in dismantling the binary distinctions between the male and female genders (Carbonieri, 2016b).

Starting from a work done in a history classroom of secondary education, the setting of which was a blog to discuss the history of racism and homophobia in a military educational institution of a metropolis in the southeastern Brazil, the Applied Linguist Fabrício (2017) discusses how the students descolonized stereotypes by means of entextualizations of multiple texts concerning racism and homosexuality. According to her, learners brought transmodal and translanguage texts and discourses that invoked different scales (family, personal, religious, universal, etc.), which thus encouraged them to engage with the difference and to stand in favour of a multiplicity of lifestyles.

In another article, Pessoa and Hoelzle (2017) discuss language teaching as a stage of language policies and argue that policies influence, but do not determine what happens in school practices. The authors resort to Biesta (2015) to point out that, ultimately, it is up to teachers to make decisions about the three educational purposes – *qualification*, *socialization* and *subjectification*⁹ – as they constantly deal with new situations that require contextual judgment. They underline that the focus of their research group has been on *subjectification* and *socialization*, drawing on theorizations of Critical Applied Linguistics, Queer Pedagogy and Decolonial Thinking, since they have worked with the stu-

⁹According to Biesta (2015, p. 77), education encompasses three domains: 1) *qualification*, “which has to do with the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions”; 2) *socialization*, which is linked to the way children and young people are initiated “in traditions and ways of being and doing, such as cultural, professional, political, religious traditions, etc”; 3) *subjectification*, “which has to do with the way in which children and young people come to exist as subjects of initiative and responsibility rather than as objects of the actions of others”.

dents' identities, but also with social issues such as race, gender, sexuality, language, ethnicity, etc. The authors present a brief discussion of their work, taken from a Master's study, the context of which was an English-language classroom of a public school in Goiânia-GO (Hoelzle, 2016). This discussion, in which gender identities are problematized, shows that, "by privileging subjectification and socialization, we are not promoting English, but rather the people who use that language" (Pessoa and Hoelzle, 2017, p. 797), that is, English is not seen as an object that should be learnt but as constituting us and constituted by us. As Makoni and Mashiri (2007, p. 62) point out, it is a "human linguistics" perspective whose central elements are the people and the activities they are engaged in.

Decoloniality in recent Brazilian teacher education scholarship

Concerning teacher education, which is the focus of this article, we have Borelli's (2018) and Silvestre's (2016) doctoral studies, as well as Jordão's (2014) discussion of some unlearning¹⁰ initiatives in a teacher education centre.

Facing the decolonial challenge to problematize colonialities that maintain and reproduce violent ways of living and thinking in this world, Borelli (2018) resorts to the knowledge of those who experience English teaching practicum – 11 school teachers, 10 university professors and 40 pre-service teachers from different contexts in the Midwest of Brazil –, aiming to problematize: a) the structure of the English practicum and its main challenges; b) the interpersonal relationships built during the teaching practicum by those participants; c) the possibilities of re-signifying both the structure and the interpersonal relations of the teaching practicum.

Regarding the structure of the teaching practicum, the author's main reflections point to a technical perspective of teacher education, in spite of being oriented by official documents that emphasize collaboration between school and university; the separation between teacher observation and teaching practice; and the lack of involvement of the pre-service and university teachers in the school life. Concerning interpersonal relationships, Borelli (2018, p. 6) problematizes "the lack of interaction that characterizes the teaching practicum, the hierarchy that separates teachers, based on the place where they work, and the type of relationship experienced within the university itself". In addition, she focuses on the conflicts that are generated by a teaching practicum that is planned at the university, without negotiation with the school. Based on these problematizations, she advocates

A decolonial teaching practicum, that goes beyond bringing university and school together, and promotes an epistemological re-conceptualization which can make the teaching practicum a space of speech and careful listening (Silvestre, 2017; Rezende, 2017) for all the participants. (Borelli, 2018, p. 6)

Along the same line of study, Silvestre (2016) aims to establish a link between collaborative and decolonial perspectives that allows us to think about the relations between the school and the university

¹⁰ According to Walsh (2018, p. 93), "learning to unlearn in order to relearn, [is] a central component of decoloniality in/as praxis".

worlds based on a language teacher education experience lived through the context of *PIBID* (*Programa Institucional de Bolsa de Iniciação à Docência* [Institutional Scholarship Program for Initiation to Teaching]) and guided by the broad scope of Critical Applied Linguistics. The researcher argues that the engagement with decolonial thinking could enable new meanings to the university-school relationship and to the process of collaborative action in language teacher education, destabilizing asymmetrical and top-down hierarchical power and knowledge relationships in our teacher education work, even in so-called collaborative practices. Silvestre (2016, p. 183) understands the collaborative actions and tensions experienced in her study as *decolonial efforts* in language teacher education – not neglecting the many elements of coloniality still strengthened in her experience – and highlights three main efforts:

- a) spaces of speech – time and place of attentive listening and emergence of different knowledges in the construction of other knowledges based on a pluralistic and dialogical logic;
- b) flattened hierarchy – an attempt to destabilize markedly asymmetrical knowledge/power relations, by decentralizing responsibilities and epistemic roles/places;
- c) teacher agency – socioculturally built/shared attitude and acknowledgment of the teacher to act in his/her professional context.

Thus, under a decolonial perspective, collaboration in language teacher education is conceptualized by Silvestre (2016, p. 121) as “a complex dialogue between agents who take part in the localized construction of knowledge about linguistic education, strongly marked by the act of listening to the different voices of this dialogical process of meaning making”. In this sense, Silvestre (2016) concludes that collaboration, in a decolonial standpoint, is built locally and requires epistemological and ontological moves in the area of Language Teacher Education.

Jordão (2014), in her turn, discusses the strong influence the binary construct “native x non-native” has exerted on Brazilian teachers of English. She claims that they have built their professional identities around the myth of the native speaker as a model of English proficiency, and, as a result, they have seen themselves as “illegitimate language users” and/or “incompetent professionals” (Jordão, 2014, p. 230). The corollary is that Brazilian teachers of English “have submitted to the colonial structure and accepted imported methods, imported language descriptions, imported acquisition theories and pedagogies” (Jordão, 2016, p. 195-196). In order to allow for transformation of these oppressive systems of meanings, participants in a teacher education center for EFL teachers (locally known as *Núcleo de Assessoria Pedagógica*¹¹ – NAP), hosted by the *Universidade Federal do Paraná*, revisited three concepts: *teacher identity*, *teacher education* and *English language teaching*. NAP’s principal activity was 60 or 120 hour-extension courses, coordinated by a university professor, which certify municipal and state primary and secondary school teachers.

Jordão (2014) claims that some unlearning moves were made at NAP underpinned by the idea that language is a practice of meaning-making, that is, meanings are always negotiated, co-constructed in relation to other meanings, other subjects, other contexts, and exist in permanent tension. In that light, language competence is defined in terms of the ability to adjust to intercultural communication

¹¹ Center for Pedagogical Support.

contexts and not in terms of nativeness. Accordingly, language teachers and students must be seen as “knowing subjects, potentially capable of creating and transforming meanings, discourses and power relations” (Jordão, 2014, p. 242). Thus, in the teacher education initiatives at NAP, they have problematized: academic knowledge and the results of a teacher education process focused on this unique knowledge; the colonizing position assumed by university professors, who believe they should project their views onto the school teachers; and the insecurity in-service Brazilian teachers of English, and even university professors, have about their knowledge of the language.

Instead of imposing an agenda, university professors were more concerned about listening to the teachers and to each other. As a result, an alternative route was created for teachers willing to experiment. They could choose to participate in courses with a familiar structure – “a pre-defined course program, groups divided according to proficiency levels, use of ‘international’ textbooks, progress assessment based on test results measuring language proficiency” (Jordão, 2014, p. 245, emphasis in original) – or they could take part in *Classroom Practices*. In these courses, groups were mixed level, syllabuses were negotiated, teaching materials were suggested by the group members, activities were orchestrated by teacher educators, who abandoned the illusion of control, methodology was shared, and participants “felt in face of the multiplicity, instability, and uncertainty involved in refusing to silence anyone” (Jordão, 2014, p. 248). Last, the author states that these courses aimed at questioning the participants’ teaching of English; problematizing the relationship between their teaching-learning practices with their identities, their profession, and their students; and redefining English “as a language used in plural cultural contexts, by and for ‘users’ rather than ‘owners’” (Jordão, 2014, p. 248, emphasis in original).

These studies show that some Brazilian scholars have been trying to challenge Eurocentrism in different school contexts. Severo (2017, p. 49, emphasis in original), for instance, argues that the emergent conditions of modern Linguistics were tightly lined to the colonial experience and defends the political principle of dialogue, that is, “a process of meaning negotiation with the ‘alterities’, deconstructing the political and economic privilege of certain European languages”. Zolin-Vesz (2016), on his turn, proposes a decolonial Applied Linguistics that breaks with our subservience towards the epistemologies produced in the North and commits itself to the struggle for the insurgence of marginalized peoples and knowledge.

We consider that these decolonizing efforts are in keeping with Walsh (2007). In her article, in which interculturality, decoloniality and education are discussed, she highlights:

The need to build educational processes that make us think and act critically, confronting and challenging the dominant relationships and structures and, at the same time, moving towards the development and implementation of a pedagogy and praxis not only critical but also decolonial. (Walsh, 2007, p. 26)

By defending such a point of view, the author invites us to go beyond educational policies or curriculum proposals and consider how the institution of education has “contributed to the colonization of minds, to the notion that science and epistemology are singular, objective and neutral, and that certain people are more apt to think than others” (Walsh, 2007, p. 28).

Challenges in the attempt to change the terms of the conversation

Mignolo (2009a, p. 4) defends that changing “the content of the conversation” is not enough and that it is crucial that we change “the terms of the conversation” so that the control of knowledge is put into question. He adds that “in order to call into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge, it is necessary to focus on the knower rather than on the known” (Mignolo, 2009a, p. 4). That is why, as previously mentioned, we started a study group instead of a traditional teaching training/education course, as described in the previous section by Jordão (2014). In other words, we did not want to set up a pre-defined course program or control frequency or evaluate the participants or have teacher educators and educatees. We wanted to try to decolonize knowledge in the group starting by focusing on the knowers. Also, we wanted teachers from different contexts to engage in sharing knowledge about English language education in our state, and we longed for collaborative group decisions concerning the group design, the content, the methodology, and the materials, as we were all participants.

However, attendance was our biggest challenge. As previously mentioned, nineteen teachers¹² took part in the face-to-face meetings, but attendance was very unstable, as shown in the following table:

Chart 1: Teachers’ attendance in the meetings

PF, PM, and WF1	1 meeting
AF and WF2	2 meetings
FF, MF1, MF2, SF1, and SF2	3 meetings
KF2 and TF	4 meetings
HF and MM	5 meetings
JF and KF1	8 meetings
LF	10 meetings
RF and VF	12 meetings

Source: Own construction based on the empirical material.

The same can be said about the virtual group. Except for our participation sending the texts that would be discussed, the reports describing the meetings, and some messages encouraging them to speak, very few participants sent messages and even fewer posted substantive messages concerning activities or texts.

We consider that we would have had more participants in the face-to-face meetings if news about the group had been better publicized by the municipal and state education networks, but what we also realize now is that we may have been naïve to think that teachers would engage in the group just be-

¹² Teachers are referred to by the first letter of their first name and F for female or M for male. Numbers 1 and 2 are used to distinguish teachers whose names start with the same letter. The three authors are identified by RF (Author 1), VF (Author 2), and JF (Author 3).

cause English teaching in our state needs to be reflected upon. Besides, the three authors of this text were getting more out of it than just sharing knowledge about English teaching and learning. We not only registered in 2017 as an extension project at the university where the first author works, but also decided it would be the theme of our (Silvestre's and Pessoa's) post-doctoral studies. So how could we ask the other teachers to seek just knowledge in return? Even having the good intention of not hierarchizing us by having educators and educatees and thus trying to avoid coloniality of knowledge by defining our roles in advance, were we not imposing on them an activity whose norms were dictated by us (coloniality of power¹³)? Were we really changing “the terms of the conversation” (Mignolo, 2009a, p. 4) for them and for us? In fact, many times when we mentioned certification, they showed concern for it as an increase in salary can result from getting a certificate. And comparing their salary to ours – ours are at least twice more than theirs –, do they not have the right to claim for a pay rise as a result of participating in a teacher education study group? Although we agreed on this issue, non-certification was a feature imposed by the municipal education network in order to manage their English teachers' attendance in the study group during their working hours. In a way, we, the coordinators, were also trapped into hegemonic power structures (Kumaravadivelu, 2016).

Our second biggest challenge was related to agency, understood as the engagement with the activities and with decisions concerning the study group. In the project, we wrote that our main aim with the study group was to create a space of speech among English teachers so that more horizontal partnerships between teachers from diverse contexts could be possible. We hoped that in that space we would be able to expand our praxis about English teaching and learning, and we cannot say this expansion did not happen as we had nineteen participants in the face-to face meetings (though they were not frequent) and forty in the virtual Google Group. We have known for a while that we have no control over subjects' “illusory” rationality and over results in education (Lopes and Borges, 2015), but we did expect more engagement on the part of the teachers.

In the first meeting, we had a discussion on the group design, but as there was no suggestion from them, our proposal to divide the meetings into two moments (one moment for discussing an academic text and another for sharing experiences) was accepted. We thought it was important to discuss with them the academic theorizations that supported our work as university teachers and researchers. Though we did not neglect *their* theorizations as teachers, as we asked them to suggest texts to read and topics to discuss, we ended up making most decisions concerning texts and topics, as we can see in the following table describing the activities done in the three terms (exceptions to this are in bold type):

As we can observe, SF1 was the only teacher who had her work (Halloween activities) problematized (21/11/2016), suggested a topic (21/11/2016), chose a text (12/12/2016), and, afterwards, voluntarily showed her work to the group making use of Power Point and pictures (12/06/2017). Curiously, as shown in Table 1, she took part in just three meetings, but she participated in the virtual group and her comments, in the feedback questionnaire (12/06/2017), mirror what we did in all the meetings. She mentioned she learned: “with her colleagues' experiences”, “by sharing her own experiences”,

¹³ Coloniality of power is a concept originally developed by Aníbal Quijano (2000) to describe the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the world as a fundamental organizer that structures all the multiple hierarchies of the world-system.

Chart 2: Description of activities

2016-2	Teachers	Activities
17/09 (Sat. 8 to 12 a.m.)	AF, JF, KF1, KF2, LF, MM, MF2, RF, SF1, and VF.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get to know (questionnaire built collaboratively by the group). - Discussion on the group organization. - Discussion on “being critical and teaching critically”. - Discussion on critical literacy in English lessons based on the video: MONTE MÓR, W. 2012. <i>Letramentos críticos e formação de professores</i>. Plenary during the “Seminário Letramentos Transnacionais Brasil-Canadá”, UFS, Sergipe. - Next meeting: VF suggested that we read a text by Míriam Jorge (2009).
10/10 (Mon. 7.30 to 11.30 a.m.)	AF, FF, JF, KF1, KF2, LF, MF1, MF2, MM, RF, VF, and WF2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion on English teaching in public schools based on the text: JORGE, M.L.S. 2009. Preconceito contra o ensino de língua estrangeira na rede pública. In: D. C. de LIMA. (org.), <i>Ensino e aprendizagem de língua inglesa: conversas com especialistas</i>. São Paulo, Parábola, p. 161-168. - MF2, a public school teacher, presented part of her Masters’ dissertation: - HOELZLE, M.J.L.R. 2016. <i>Desestabilizando sociabilidades em uma sala de aula de Língua Inglesa de uma escola pública</i>. Goiânia, GO. Dissertação de Mestrado. Universidade Federal de Goiás, 166 p. - Next meeting: VF suggested that we read a text by Ana Paula Duboc (2015).
21/11 (Mon. 7.30 to 11.30 a.m)	FF, JF, LF, SF1, RF VF, and WF2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion about cracks in the textbook to work with critical literacy based on the text: DUBOC, A.P. 2014. Letramento crítico nas brechas da sala de aula de línguas estrangeiras. In: N. H. TAKAKI; R. F. MACIEL (org.), <i>Letramentos em terra de Paulo Freire</i>. Campinas, Pontes Editores, p. 209-229. - Discussion on the criticality of Halloween activities put into practice by SF1. - Activity: finding cracks in the textbooks used by the teachers. - Next meeting: SF1 suggested that we read about “hybrid teaching”.
12/12 (Mon. 7.30 to 11.30 a.m)	KF1, LF, MF1, RF, and VF.	<p>Discussion on hybrid teaching based on the text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VALENTE, J.A. 2015. Prefácio: o ensino híbrido veio para ficar. In: L. BACICH; A. TANZI NETO; F. M. TREVISANI (org.), <i>Ensino híbrido: personalização e tecnologia na educação</i>. Porto Alegre, Penso, p. 13-17. - We talked about our experiences with technology and the difficulties working with technology entails. Next meeting: RF suggested that we read the text by Silvestre (2015).
2017-1	Teachers	Activities
06/03 (Mon. 7.30 to 11.30 a.m)	FF, JF, KF1, KF2, LF, MM, RF, and VF.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion on a critical perspective of English teaching at school based on the text: SILVESTRE, V.P.V. 2015. Ensinar e aprender língua estrangeira/adicional na escola: a relação entre perspectivas críticas e uma experiência prática localizada. <i>Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada</i>, Belo Horizonte, 15(1):61-84. - Discussion on our students’ expansion of perspectives. - Next meeting: planning of a critical activity.

Chart 2: continuation

<p>03/04 (Mon. 7.30 to 11.30 a.m)</p>	<p>HF, LF, PF, MF1, MF2, PM, RF, SF2, TF, VF, and WF1.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion on why to teach additional languages at school based on part of the book: SCHLATTER, M.; GARCEZ, P. M. 2012. <i>Línguas adicionais na escola: aprendizagens colaborativas em inglês</i>. Erechim, Edelbra, 174 p. - Discussion on the importance of developing lessons based on the students' interests: videogames, series, funk/rap etc. - Discussion on our impressions on academic research. - Construction of a didactic sequence about <i>T-shirt messages</i>.
<p>08/05 (Mon. 7.30 to 11.30 a.m)</p>	<p>HF, JF, KF1, MM, RF, SF2, TF, and VF.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion on critical literacy based on the text: JORDÃO, C.M. 2013. Letramento crítico em 2.500 palavras mais ou menos. In: C. M. JORDÃO et al. <i>O PIBID nas aulas de inglês: divisor de águas e formador de marés</i>. Campinas, Pontes Editores, p. 41-46. - Sharing experiences about the didactic sequence <i>T-shirt messages</i>.
<p>12/06 (Mon. 7.30 to 11.30 a.m)</p>	<p>HF, JF, LF, RF, SF1, and VF.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion on the video “<i>The danger of a single story</i>” by Chimamanda Adichie and on the <i>single stories</i> about public schools, English teaching and our lives in general. - SF1 presented a video of one of her lessons, in which the students sang songs in English, and showed the Power Point slides she works with at the beginning of each school year, aiming at making students interested in learning English. - Questionnaire followed by discussion focusing on our participation in GEPLIGO. 1) For you, what is GEPLIGO? 2) What have you learned in the group? 3) How have you contributed to the group? 4) What meaning(s) have the studies of the group had in your teaching practice?
<p>2017-2</p>	<p>Teachers</p>	<p>Activities</p>
<p>14/08 (Mon. 7.30 to 11.30 a.m)</p>	<p>HF, LF, RF, TF, and VF.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VF brought three books on Information and Communication Technologies in Education (ICTE) so that the group could choose topics of their interest. The topics chosen were: duolingo, whatsApp and applications in general, and social networks. - Discussion on the texts: REINDERS, H. 2010. <i>Twenty Ideas for Using Mobile Phones in the Language Classroom</i>. Available at: http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ914893.pdf VERNER, S. 2017. <i>Why You Should Use Cell Phones in Class: 8 Activities For Putting Phones to Positive Use in the ESL Classroom</i>. Available at: http://busyteacher.org/11168-how-to-use-cell-phones-classroom-8-esl-activities.html - Discussion on our use of technology in the classroom and the problem of using it. - We did some WhatsApp activities: <i>circular writing</i> or <i>chain story</i>; questions to practice <i>present continuous</i> and conversation. - We decided that we would develop a <i>class activity with WhatsApp</i> and report it to group the following meeting.

Chart 2: continuation

11/09 (Mon. 7.30 to 11.30 a.m)	HF, KF1, KF2, LF, MM, RF, SF2, and VF.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We shared our experiences with WhatsApp activities. - Barbra Sabota (an invited university teacher) gave a mini-course entitled “Digital literacy and teacher education in the Letras course: mediation proposals concerning the use of Information and Communication Digital Technologies”.
09/10 (Mon. 7.30 to 11.30 a.m)	KF1, LF, JF, RF, TF, and VF.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion on social networks based on the text: GOMES, L.F. 2016. Redes sociais e escola: o que temos de aprender?. In: J. ARAÚJO; V. LEFFA (org.), <i>Redes sociais e ensino de línguas: o que temos de aprender?</i> São Paulo, Parábola Editorial, p. 81-92. - Discussion on activities using Information and Communication Digital Technologies.
06/11 (Mon. 7.30 to 11.30 a.m)	KF1, JF, RF, SF2, and VF.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion on the importance of having clear objectives for our lessons and for activities, of comprehending linguistic and educational objectives, of using the four skills, and of speaking English in our study group, based on the text: JUCÁ, L.C.V. 2016. Ensinando Inglês na Escola Regular: a escolha dos caminhos a seguir depende de onde se quer chegar. In: D. M. JESUS.; D. CARBONIERI (org.), <i>Práticas de multiletramentos e letramento crítico: outros sentidos para a sala de aula de línguas</i>. Campinas, Pontes, p. 99-120. - Discussion on the group guided by these two questions: 1) What motivates you to stay in the group? Why? 2) What would you like to be different in the group?

Source: Own construction based on the empirical material.

“new perspectives about English teaching in public schools”, “new ways of teaching English in a contextualized way with the lessons shared by the group about *T-shirt messages*”, and “the importance of critical teaching in English lessons”.

LF, on the other hand, came to ten of the twelve meetings (see Table 1) and was engaged in the discussions, expressing relevant points of view and describing activities that problematized social issues such as racism. In the feedback questionnaire, she affirmed that she contributed to the group “by sharing her own experiences” and “by giving her opinion on the topics discussed”. She also stated she learned “new approaches and methodologies” and that she was not “alone in respect of difficulties to develop a good education”.

KF1’s participation has also to be underscored, as she took part in eight meetings and always spoke her mind, having reported many events in which she had taken critical standpoints in class and at school. Besides, she was the teacher who arranged with her school headmaster that our meetings would be held there. Thus, after the first meeting at the university facilities, all the others were held in a room in the public school where KF1 worked. The reason why she did not come to all our meetings

was that she sometimes had to do other activities at school, but she was always there when we arrived and made sure we were well settled. Meeting at a public school was one of our attempts to question the school as the space of the inferior other of colonialism that does not produce knowledge and to make it a place of theorizing about English teaching.

The attitudes of these three teachers drew our attention as they indeed showed agency. In Silvestre's (2016) study about a teacher education experience, described in the previous section, agency was built by means of collaboration among the seven student teachers, the school teacher and the university teacher to plan the lessons, to produce teaching materials based on critical perspectives, and to teach the lessons. Similarly, we expected the teachers to share power with us, that is, to make decisions with us, but we have learnt from Foucault (2014) that power cannot be given, it is exercised. Besides, we know power relations will always be present in the group, but we wonder how it could be more flattened, that is, how we could crack the markedly asymmetrical relationship between university and school.

It is true that we cannot get rid of our identities as university teachers, who, for example, usually have more access to academic knowledge, have better working conditions and better salaries, have more time to read and to research, and publish academic texts (one of the texts we read in the study group was written by the second author of this article (06/03/2017)). Of course, we avoided the binary "university knowledge" and "school knowledge" as we are aware that the first is seen as superior to the other (Borelli, 2018), but the fact is that the power of university knowledge is manifested in the activities done in the three terms. Does it not reflect coloniality of knowledge, which, according to Lander (2005), is expressed by the idea that scientific knowledge was elected as superior to other forms of knowledge and, worse, considered the only valid form? Does it not reinforce the notion that "certain people are more apt to think than others"? (Walsh, 2007, p. 28).

Based on such reflections, Pessoa (2018) argues that a critical – and we should add here *decolonial* – teacher education should start from praxis¹⁴. By *praxis*, she means *identity practices*, involving teachers' subjectivities, and *school praxis*, involving what they do everyday in the schools where they teach. According to her, these practices can be reconstructed by articulating the theorizations underlying them and other theorizations that will become necessary to deal with the challenges that arise from these practices. Thus, as we had a bigger group of teachers and a new organization from 2018 on, supported by the municipal education network, our praxis has been at the core of our discussions. We consider it to be a more radical attempt to focus on the knower (Mignolo, 2009a) and it may lead us more easily to the coordinated set of actions or to the grammar of decoloniality that Kumaravadivelu (2016) defends for the area of Language Teacher Education.

Further moves

Our teacher education experience was an attempt to fight coloniality and power established between universities and schools by creating a non-institutionalized study group with no pre-determined

¹⁴The term "praxis" is used as the inextricable connection between practice and theory, that is, "the continuous reflexive integration of thought, desire and action" (Simon, 1992 *apud* Pennycook, 2001, p. 3).

rules. We expected we would expand our praxis about English teaching and learning in the state of Goiás, and, to some extent, it happened. However, we consider the initiative was jeopardized due to poor attendance and lack of agency. We could point out some reasons why we believe it happened, but we have tried to reflect upon the relevance of GEPLIGO for us three and for them, having agreed that it is more relevant for us academically and professionally.

These reflections made us contact the municipal and state education networks at the beginning of 2018 to show our project. We proposed to offer a certified study group for English teachers and asked them to publicize it, so that more teachers would take part in it and could be more frequent. We are aware that with this agreement we will have to control attendance and assess them, and our concern is whether we will not maintain dominant structures of knowledge and power because of that, but we hope we can transform attendance into engagement, and we have no doubt we can assess them in less authoritatively ways (Duboc, 2016). As far as content and methodology are concerned, we will continue to negotiate them as done previously and we expect that they make more decisions and that our agenda be negotiated.

Furthermore, one way of decolonizing knowledge and power is to dismantle binaries that determine academic knowledge, and we consider that much more can go on between educators and educatees than these two words traditionally entail. A classroom is a place where meanings and socialities are constantly being negotiated by its agents and, accordingly, being transformed. Besides, we need to question imprisoning narratives of our identities (Lopes and Fabrício, 2013). After all, it has been a long while since we have heard that educators and educatees are permanent learners and sense makers, even more now that new spaces of knowledge have been created by technology. So, it is up to us to make our identities as educators and educatees more complex. However, we cannot forget that education is a modern creation representing the privileges of Eurocentric knowledge, so, with Patel (2015, p. 15), we know how difficult it is to fight coloniality in education as it “will be pervasively experienced, wrought upon, and tightly protected, almost regardless of what our ethical stances on oppression might be”.

All in all, this difficulty will not discourage us from continuing our educational projects and to problematize them, or as Lopes and Borges (2015) would say, from searching to stabilize the chaos of existence, to find points of approximation and to fill the void that torments us. We know our project results will always be unpredictable, but we believe we can work with contextual and non-fixed identity projects, that is, with projects, plans, options, and conflicts which are negotiated contextually (Lopes and Borges, 2015). That is our bet to continue trying to challenge coloniality.

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