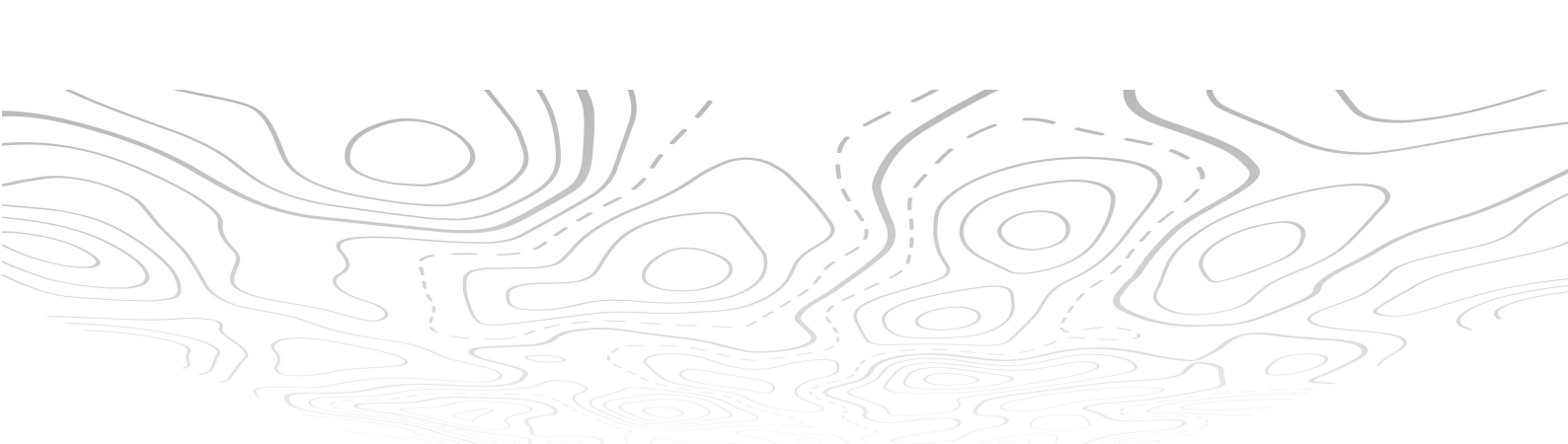




DECOLONIALITY AND CRITICALITY IN ELT FIELD: STRUGGLES, UNCERTAINTIES, AND POSSIBILITIES WITH/FOR STUDENTS AT A PUBLIC SCHOOL¹

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Introduction

This paper is a reflection about the struggles, uncertainties, and possibilities in a public school in Colombia, South America, involved with a decolonial/critical option in the English Language Teaching (ELT) field.

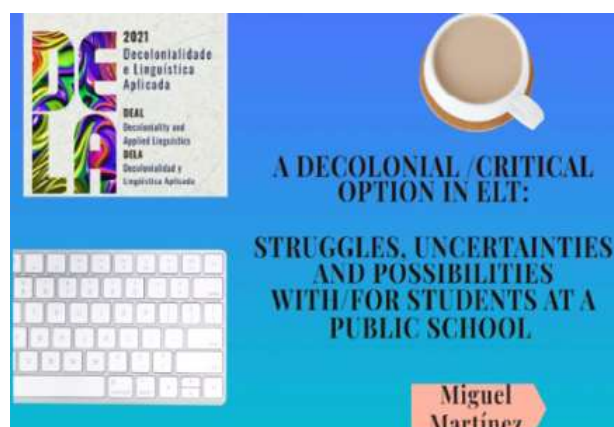
The information of this text evidence a presentation that took place at the DELA, Decoloniality and Applied Linguistics Congress, 2021. In this participation I had the opportunity to present a reality in my country that concerns the teaching of English as a foreign language, the resistance faced by these processes and the realities that happen inside and outside the classroom. My position emerges from the local, authentic, and unexpected situations in the school where I work as an ELT Educator. The decolonial project has been manifested during my teaching/learning practices, as well as the critical position within the ELT field.

This research is running nowadays and there are some uncertain aspects, such as methodology, analysis, and results; however, its first step is presenting an open panorama about the realities of the context and some variety of struggles. This first step will be presented here, concerning the problem statements, main issues and possibilities within/for the target population.

The following document shows the presentation with the slides I included in the Congress (with their respective explanation). The invitation to the reader is to walk next to me during the presentation titled *Decolonial/Critical option in ELT: struggles, uncertainties, and possibilities with/for students at a public school*.

1 Transcrição livre da fala realizada no primeiro ciclo do evento Decolonialidade e Linguística Aplicada.

Slide 1



Fonte: o autor

The title of my presentation (slide 1) is A Decolonial/Critical option in ELT: struggles, uncertainties, and possibilities with/for students at a public school, here in Bogota, Colombia. I am an ELT educator and I want to thank you once more for this chance to present our reality, our context, and our uncertainties here in my country, Colombia.

Slide 2

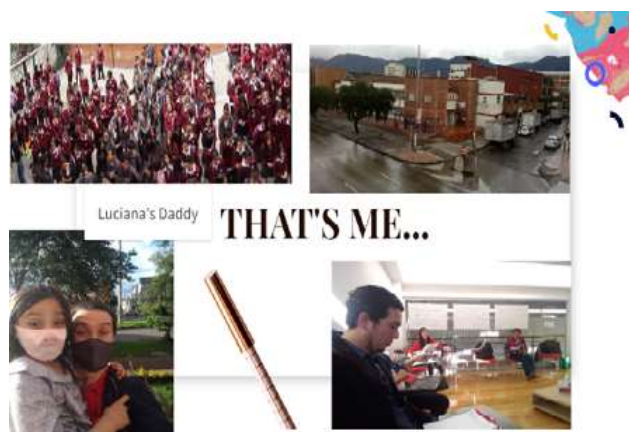


Fonte: o autor

Mine is not a very straightforward agenda (slide 2)–of course, this is not a structuralist presentation, so I would like to tell you something about myself as an introduction. I would like to say something from a very starting point, then also some perspectives and a reflection, a theory that I use to analyze my context based on some local assumptions, and finally I would like to get a group discussion, I mean, here, together. The idea of this presentation is to try to

create a great atmosphere. I think this is a good chance to interact with the participants of the conference, to learn together and finally to have some conclusions or some reflections.

Slide 3



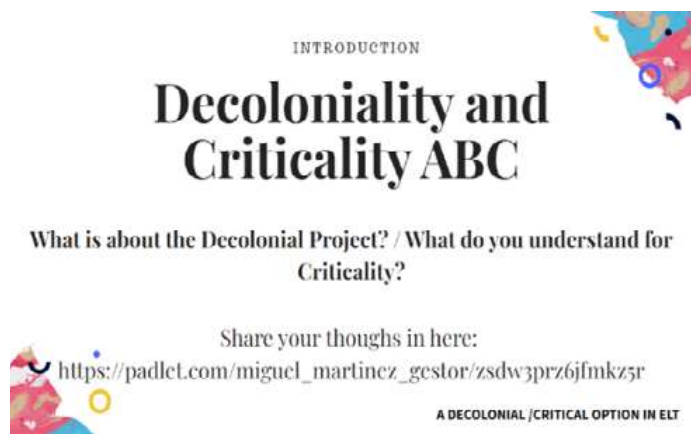
Fonte: o autor

Let's start with this short introduction (slide 3): that's me, Miguel Martinez, but I'm also, Luciana's daddy, my daughter is a marvelous girl, so intelligent, and I'm more than happy to be in her life, I really appreciate this opportunity to be dad in my life.

Also, I am a student – well, currently I am conducting my Ph.D. studies in education; I am a Ph.D. candidate in education, and my major is ELT education. I work as an ELT educator in Bogota, Colombia, in a public school. The school is in the south of the city. It is a public school–too many realities here from students, I tend to say this is the real context an educator should be faced with, I mean, should be involved in. The school in total has more than 1,200 students and they represent, not privileged strata here in Bogota. It means, that here in Bogota we have different strata: from one to six. Most of my students and the community are in the first, lower, let's say lower, not privileged one. Students at school have really hard conditions, especially in terms of poverty, and insecurity, for example, they are going to be mugged maybe tomorrow, maybe this afternoon, because the violence in this specific place is so hard. On the same token, their families represent what we need to learn from, and when what we need to be involved with. Well, this is the school where I am... the place where I belong.

Theoretical Background

Slide 4



INTRODUCTION

Decoloniality and Criticality ABC

What is about the Decolonial Project? / What do you understand for Criticality?

Share your thoughts in here:

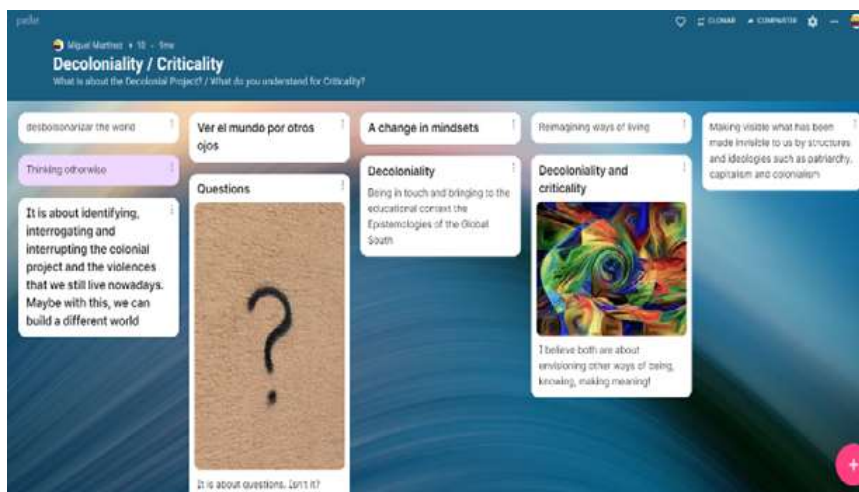
https://padlet.com/miguel_martinez_gestor/zsdw3prz6jfmkz5r

A DECOLONIAL / CRITICAL OPTION IN ELT

Fonte: o autor

The name of this talk is Decoloniality and Criticality in the ELT field, but first I would like to do an exercise about the ABC of decoloniality and criticality (slide 4), and I would like to share your ideas in a Padlet. So, there are two questions: which are no direct questions or top-down process questions, but I would like to know something about the decolonial project, what you know about the decolonial project and some ideas about criticality or critical stance... well, not just in education, but in general.

Slide 5



padlet Miguel Martinez • 10 • free

Decoloniality / Criticality

What is about the Decolonial Project? / What do you understand for Criticality?

descolonizar the world

Ver el mundo por otros ojos

A change in mindsets

Remagining ways of living

Making visible what has been made invisible to us by structures and ideologies such as patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism

Thinking otherwise

It is about identifying, interrogating and interrupting the colonial project and the violences that we still live nowadays. Maybe with this, we can build a different world

Questions

It is about questions, isn't it?

Decoloniality

Being in touch and bringing to the educational context the Epistemologies of the Global South

Decoloniality and criticality

I believe both are about envisioning other ways of being, knowing, making meaning!

Fonte: o autor

Here (slide 5) it can be seen the insights during the participation,

“Both are about envisioning other ways of being, making meaning”, “being in touch and bringing to the educational context the epistemologies of the global south”, “it is about questions, isn’t it?” “Identifying, interrogating and interrupting the colonial project”

We can see here personal, political, and social opinions. In terms of decoloniality and criticality, the reflection relies on reflecting upon the sociopolitical impact in education. Decoloniality as a theory of life invites all of us to “learn to discover new questions to encounter new answers” (DUSSEL, 2011, p. xviii). The Decolonial project is founded on the will to live not the will to power.

Another purpose of this presentation grounds on analyzing our assumptions, our feelings and our desires, and our thoughts about decoloniality and criticality.

Something personal about the decolonial project deals with the path we have walked through. It has been a painful process, especially because I am an English as a Foreign Language teacher, so it means teaching lessons in a colonial, Eurocentric/north one-way, and an oppressed system. But also, I am learning with my students from this language.

Some aspects of this pain and these hard situations are not easy to handle, and I have some scars on my skin, in my soul, and my learning process.

Slide 6



Fonte: o autor

Having it in mind, we can observe some perspectives about criticality and decoloniality (slide 6). Criticality deals with aspects such as social transformations, inequalities, and power issues, among other aspects but this is just in terms of education. Now, in the lands of the ELT field, teachers should keep in mind those outcomes, those contexts. Decoloniality is against all fundamentalisms and egoisms. The principles are based on racial inclusivity and equality within the whole community.

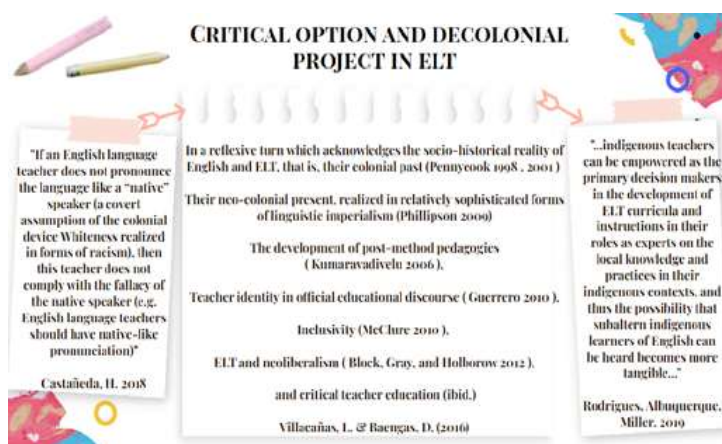
Criticality (in education). A disposition for purposeful thinking and acting guided by criteria that are contextually appropriate and that are expected to result in positive outcomes related to the purpose. (RAE Dictionary)

Decoloniality. An emerging movement from Latin America that focuses on understanding modernity in the context of a form of critical theory applied to ethnic studies. It has been described as consisting of “analytical and practical options that confront and disengage from the [...] colonial matrix of power”; it has also been referred to as a kind of “radical exteriority thinking” (LANDER, 1997)

From my position, I am – “mestizo”, it is the name of a combination between indigenous people and white Spanish, I also work as an ELT educator, and I would like to say that because it is a need to know our ancestors and especially to reflect upon the decolonial project. We need to believe in our epistemologies, and our ways of acting are ways of learning, –our ways of doing something remarkable, and meaningful. I tend to say that it is a beautiful opportunity to keep in mind the educational contexts in this decolonial/critical project.

Criticality and Decoloniality in ELT

Slide 7



Fonte: o autor

In addition, I got information from the critical option and decolonial project, but in the ELT field.

From a personal experience, here in the school where I work, I realize students pay special attention to the pronunciation of the English language teacher and, there are some ways of racism when the teacher is not speaking “accurately”, what accuracy means is like what is the *appropriate* English spoken. This is one of my concerns when researching the ELT teaching/learning possibilities in a decolonial project.

I make many mistakes when I´m speaking English, especially because I am a human, and second because I think we need to be very humble, as Stein stated, “I need to be so humble with the learning process because this is not an authority about learning a language, this is not

a vertical option”. Learning a language should be a horizontal way, and I think this special part in pronunciation plays a relevant role in the decolonial project, especially in the ELT field.

In the middle of the previous slide, we have some critical options in the ELT field. The first one is from Pennycook, “in a reflexive turn which acknowledges the socio-historical reality of English and ELT, that is, their colonial past” (1998; 2001) It has been said before the socio-historical realities from a critical perspective. The second one, Phillipson states, “their neo-colonial presence realized in relatively sophisticated forms of linguistic imperialism” (2009). And it is important to add something to this quote, not only imperialism but also neoliberal ideas, the neoliberalism movement.

Kumaravadivelu also states “the development of post-method pedagogies” (2006). It can be inferred that we are not talking just about one pedagogy, one truth—there are many which are rounded our local practices.

Guerrero (2010) argues that teacher identity in official educational discourses is relevant in the ELT field. She states the importance of official education policies in ELT, and we should criticize those policies and keep in mind some ideas related to the identities of teachers.

The slide shows relevant stances on the ELT field joined with the decolonial project; In fact, this ongoing research persuades the options and possibilities the ELT educators have at the time of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in a public school (within local and constant realities). For example, in Brazil, Rodriguez, Albuquerque, and Miller (2019) put on the table that indigenous teachers can be in power as the primary decision makers in the development of the ELT curricula and instructions in their roles as experts on local knowledge and practices in their indigenous contexts, and thus the possibility that subaltern indigenous learners of English can be heard becomes more tangible.

Related to the last quotation, (RODRIGUES; ALBUQUERQUE; MILLER, 2009) I should say that I have six indigenous students here in the school and there is something remarkable about the learning/teaching practices – in terms of local realities while fixing Decoloniality in the ELT field.

Some time ago, one of the indigenous students asked me “Miguel, why do I need to know English? What is the need of learning English?” The student does not know the purpose of learning this language and it is totally valid... I was scared of replying something because, I am not in his position. I have never been in an indigenous community with his cosmovision, with his way of understanding ideas and assuming some knowledges... and I was in panic, and I replied with another question, “Why do you think that so?” And he said: “Oh, because everybody speaks

this language and everybody understands it” and I was like, “Yeah! That’s true, all right?” But he learns English not just as a power issue, because English may be seen as a possibility for his life.

Package of concerns are done in my daily teaching/learning practices, and I enjoy that because it is the local experience, it is my local reality, and it is the reality in a public school and especially with indigenous students.

From a personal reflection, I have the chance to see/analyze the role of experts in education and the ELT field. Despite that, the indigenous language offers a high variety of options and they should be seen as experts in the language and should be positioned as an authority on that because they can offer us too many meaningful aspects not just in education but in the ELT field.

Realities and challenges when teaching EFL

Slide 8



Fonte: o autor

Moreover, the presentation goes into the local realities while teaching EFL. During this part, I allow to state the importance of critical and social aspects at time of carrying out English language classes. In Canagarajah’s (2005) words, “local knowledge has to be veritably reconstructed through an ongoing process of critical reinterpretation, counter discursive negotiation, and imaginative application” (p. 12).

Slide 8 proposes some key aspects to put on the table.

There are four statements which need to be discussed.

- Poverty and violence are struggles and challenges of the real world. Students at school face daily different situation which could affect their learning process, but they are aware of these issues since it is part of the country's socio-political mediation.
- Linguistic racism is seen as an ELT teaching practice because of the neoliberalism and capitalism construction of the "beautiful" view of doing teaching. Elitism perpetuated in the ELT field (SIQUEIRA, 2021).

Students at my school, teachers, the community, my community, are facing linguistic racism, poverty, violence, but especially there are some difficulties, struggles and, challenges in the real world.

I also realize some of my colleagues, other ELT teachers feel superior when they are teaching lessons in English just because they speak this language, they can talk accurately in a different language. I have observed an elitism perpetuated in the ELT field and this is something that I would like to bear in mind in the future because I think there is too much to analyze and to co-construct within the whole community.

The other aspects related to local realities while teaching EFL deal with the language proficiency inequalities and connectivity with the government. The previous ones are issues in Colombia but are very similar to South American countries.

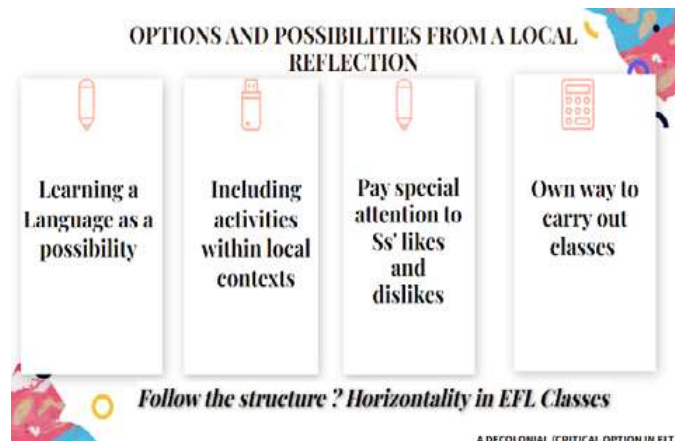
As an English Language teacher, you are moved into a specific level, if you are C1 (English proficiency level- Common European Framework Reference), B2, B1, so on; and people pay special attention to the level, but there are too many inequalities. For instance, here in the school some students can interpret the language, let's say English, in a good way. But there are others, that I cannot give a specific, "*brand*" for the student, like you are an A1, B1, or B2...

There exist many inequalities in terms of language proficiency and the government is an obstacle in the process because the government does not give us support, especially in terms of connectivity, with all the requirements and we do not have here many possibilities to teach a class.

It is a must to raise our voices, they should be heard, and the government needs to know the difficulties schools are faced day by day. Many ELT educators have great ideas to do something incredible, but someone does not pay attention to the local community, they pay more attention to other perspectives (foreign ones), and this is the time for considering the knowledge base of local ELT Educators.

Possibilities and Options

Slide 9



Fonte: o autor

The last slide of the presentation (slide 9) evidences the conclusion of the struggles, uncertainties, and possibilities with/for students at a public school in a decolonial view.

Here it can be seen the options and possibilities from a local perspective.

Number one is that learning a language, French, Italian, Japanese...etc., should be seen as a possibility, not a power issue. From a very critical stand, a Foreign Language should be learned as a possibility in the future. If they learn a language to travel, to get a job, or simply to have fun, I consider it important to respect that and offer them options to do it.

Second, I think it necessary to include activities within local contexts; teachers could connect the global opportunities with local issues. So then, it is important to think globally but act locally. Setting up activities with local contexts but not just talking about the local context, from a very intercultural possibility, to explore more about our local contexts in English.

The third one is about paying attention to students' likes and dislikes. As a decolonial possibility we need to learn with the students and from the students, also, teachers would be humble when we are giving lessons because we can learn a lot from them. This is a horizontal situation when we are giving lessons here in class.

Last but not the least, we, ELT educators, have our own way to carry out classes. There is a perpetuated structure in the ELT field that we prepare the classes with a presentation-practice and production structure. A reflection in this part emerges and it is about, why do we still follow the structures/guidelines? Several paths to bringing a class are seen in different contexts, so, we may continue our own way to carry out the classes, to give the lessons, it is import-

ant to keep in mind our epistemologies. In the ELT field, we follow the structure. How about our own way to carry out the classes, or the horizontality in the EFL classes?

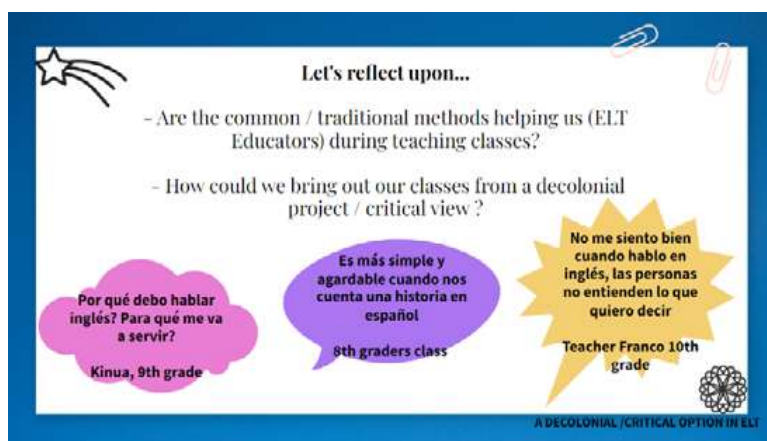
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Discussion and Conclusion

Slide 10



Fonte: o autor

This presentation is grounded around some questions, are the common or traditional methods helping us, ELT educators, teach our classes? How could we bring out our classes from a decolonial project/critical view?

To conclude, it is important to reflect on provincial/local/authentic practices in EFL teaching. The possibilities and opportunities in a public school are claiming with and for the students

(from a horizontal movement), providing different ways of thinking and acting, and finally, the teachers should listen to the thoughts of the students in their classrooms.

The Decolonial/Critical option in ELT is nothing more than pedagogical and critical tools that question the knowledge that has been imposed on us through history, it is the process of emancipation of different social aspects such as love, and learning a foreign language, or issues that Eurocentrism has dominated. The ELT educator who teaches EFL has a concept that is linked to coloniality/modernity; however, it is the time of visibility of knowledge not proposed by others... but of our own, of our community... our knowledge. The students in a public school in South America realize the importance of the learning, unlearning, and relearning needed to direct the decolonization when getting an EFL class, in the ELT field.



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