

## Social Justice, Emotions, and Decoloniality in Language Teacher Education

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The early decades of the twenty-first century have been marked by a paradox that weighs heavily on education: while democratic ideals and commitments to human rights have expanded in formal discourse, the social and political landscape has grown increasingly hostile to the very communities those ideals were meant to protect. The resurgence of extremist political movements across Latin America, Europe, and beyond has accelerated processes of democratic erosion, cultural retrenchment, and the delegitimization of knowledge produced by historically marginalized groups (Giroux, 2020; Riddle; Apple, 2019). In this climate, educational institutions have become contested terrain, where curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher education are never merely technical concerns but profoundly political ones. Language education occupies a particularly fraught position within these disputes, since questions of whose language, culture, and knowledge are recognized as legitimate remain unresolved in both

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policy and practice (Norton; Toohey, 2011). Against this backdrop, the call for language teacher education grounded in social justice and decolonial thought gains renewed urgency, especially where technicist models continue to eclipse the ethical, relational, and political purposes of the profession.

Scholars in both applied linguistics and critical pedagogy have long argued that preparing language teachers cannot be reduced to the transmission of methods or disciplinary content alone (Freire, 1970; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Teacher education is instead a formative process in which identities, beliefs, values, and emotional dispositions are shaped, negotiated, and contested (Kalaja et al., 2016; Mora; Pentón Herrera, 2026). Yet dominant models in the field still privilege technical competence over ethical and political consciousness, reproducing hierarchies of knowledge that marginalize decolonial, Global South, and socio-emotional perspectives (Kubota, 2020; Mignolo; Walsh, 2018). This concern also converges with the emotional turn in applied linguistics, which has shown emotions to be socially mediated, politically consequential, and central to teacher development rather than private or secondary variables (Benesch, 2017; De Costa et al., 2018; Swain, 2013). In that sense, we begin this conversation by approaching language teacher education as a site where justice, care, reflexivity, and decolonial critique become indispensable to professional formation and transformative practice.

In this special issue, we respond to the pressing need to reimagine language teacher education amid rising authoritarianism, epistemic exclusion, and the persistence of technicist models that restrict ethical and political engagement. To do so, we bring into dialogue contributions that approach language teacher education as an ethical, affective, and epistemic project. Rather than treating social justice, emotions, and decoloniality as separate concerns, the collection frames them as mutually constitutive dimensions of teacher formation and professional practice. Social justice draws attention to unequal conditions of participation, recognition, and possibility; emotions reveal how such conditions are lived, negotiated, and resisted in everyday educational spaces; and decoloniality challenges the historical and epistemological structures that continue to naturalize exclusion in language education. The articles gathered here reflect this shared commitment by examining language teacher education across diverse contexts and showing how professional formation is shaped by struggles over knowledge, identity, power, and belonging. In what follows, we develop these three dimensions as a framework for the issue and then present the contributions, whose inquiries collectively

highlight both the challenges and the transformative possibilities of preparing language teachers for more just futures.

### **Social Justice, Emotions, and Decoloniality**

This special issue is grounded in a view of language teacher education that places social justice, emotions, and decoloniality at the center of professional formation. From this perspective, becoming a teacher involves not only learning to teach but also negotiating relations of power, affect, knowledge, and belonging. To speak of justice in teacher education is to ask who is recognized, whose knowledge is legitimized, and what kinds of pedagogical futures are made imaginable. To speak of emotions is to recognize that the pedagogical locus should never be understood as only cognitive or methodological, but also as affective, relational, and ethical; to speak of decoloniality is to confront the historical continuities that shape language education through hierarchies of language, race, culture, and knowledge. What emerges, then, is not a triad of fashionable terms, but a framework for reading teacher education as a site of dispute, reflection, and transformation. This framework of social justice, emotions, and decoloniality is especially relevant in this collection, as the contributions enclosed repeatedly return to questions of vulnerability, dignity, critique, and agency across distinct educational spaces.

Within this framework, social justice refers to more than the inclusion of marginalized themes or populations in curricular discourse. It concerns the reorganization of educational relations so that participation, recognition, and legitimacy are not reserved for those already aligned with dominant norms. In language teacher education, this means preparing teachers to read (in)equality not as background context but as constitutive of pedagogical life itself. It also means treating languages, identities, and ways of knowing that have historically been subordinated as central to educational inquiry and practice. Such a view resonates with longstanding work in critical pedagogy and applied linguistics that understands teaching as inseparable from questions of power, democracy, and humanization (Freire, 1970; Kubota, 2020). It also finds support in work that frames social justice in language education as inseparable from practices of restoration, healing, and collective responsibility (Pentón Herrera; McNair, 2021). In this sense, social justice becomes both an ethical commitment and a formative orientation in teacher education.

Emotions are equally central to this discussion because they reveal how educational structures are lived, interpreted, and contested. Emotions are not private residues of professional life, nor secondary factors that can be separated from cognition, reflection, or pedagogy. Emotions shape what teachers notice, what they fear, what they resist, and what they come to value in themselves and in others. Research in applied linguistics has shown with increasing clarity that beliefs, identities, and emotions are co-constructed within sociohistorical contexts, and that their relationship is especially important in processes of teacher learning and development (Barcelos, 2015; Benesch, 2017; Swain, 2013). From this perspective, hope, (in)security, (dis)comfort, care, shame, love, or pride are not incidental to teacher education; they are part of the substance of professional formation. Recent scholarship has also strengthened this point by showing how emotional labor and emotional intelligence can illuminate the complexity of language teaching in contexts marked by instability, vulnerability, and ethical demand (Colombo-Gomes, 2026; Pentón Herrera, 2024). Attention to emotions, therefore, helps restore depth to discussions of teacher education that have too often been flattened by technicist logic.

A decolonial perspective sharpens this discussion further by making visible the enduring force of coloniality in language education. Coloniality persists not only in the privileging of certain languages or varieties but also in the normalization of particular epistemologies, subject positions, and models of teacher expertise. It informs what counts as valid knowledge, which pedagogical traditions are treated as universal, and whose histories are made peripheral or absent. A decolonial approach does not simply add diversity to existing structures; it questions the very grounds on which those structures have been built and sustained (Mignolo; Walsh, 2018). In language teacher education, this requires sustained attention to epistemic plurality, to Global South and local knowledges, and to the material conditions in which educators and students negotiate meaning, dignity, and belonging. Further, it also requires recognizing that emotions themselves are implicated in coloniality, since fear, shame, silence, and discomfort often register the embodied effects of exclusion while also opening possibilities for critique and re-existence (Barcelos; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018; Colombo-Gomes, 2022). Decoloniality, in this sense, is both critique and horizon.

Seen in relation to one another, these three dimensions offer a language for understanding why teacher education must be rethought beyond instrumental training models. Social justice draws attention to the unequal arrangements that shape educational participation and possibilities. Emotions show how those arrangements are experienced in everyday

pedagogical life and how they may become sources of refusal, care, and transformation. Decoloniality names the broader historical and epistemological structures that sustain exclusion while also pointing toward other ways of knowing and teaching. This special issue is animated by precisely these intersections, as shown in Figure 1. Across studies of supervised practicum, pedagogical love, school violence, anti-racist Spanish teaching, Quilombola education, prison-based teacher formation, textbook silencing, curricular decolonization, and public-school praxiologies, the articles present in this collection insist that language teacher education is neither neutral nor complete; it is, instead, an unfinished, contested, and deeply human field of practice. The contributions that follow make this argument from different angles, and it is to those contributions that we now turn.

**Figure 1**

*Social justice, emotions, and decoloniality as a framework for language teacher education*



## **The contributions in this special issue**

The articles gathered in this special issue reflect the conceptual architecture outlined earlier and give it concrete form across a wide range of educational settings. The issue begins with emotions as a central axis, then moves toward their articulation with school and social contexts, deepens the dialogue with decoloniality and social justice, and closes with structural, curricular, and praxiological reflections on language teacher education. This organization is not merely editorial; it allows readers to see how the affective, ethical, and political dimensions of teacher formation unfold across different sites of practice and inquiry, while also revealing the breadth of contexts in which justice, care, and decolonial critique become pedagogically consequential.

The first group of articles places emotions at the center of teacher education. Silvestre-Ramos and Lopes Leal examine the supervised practicum as an affective-political space in the initial education of English language teachers. Their study shows that emotions such as hope and insecurity are not peripheral to practicum experience, but central to how pre-service teachers interpret reality, position themselves pedagogically, and resist hegemonic discourses and practices. Vieira and Barcelos also contribute to this discussion by focusing on pedagogical love, an emotion still underexplored in Applied Linguistics. Their case study in a public school points to the need for teacher education spaces where love can be discussed not as sentimentality, but as a belief-laden and pedagogically significant dimension of professional life. Aragão and Martins extend this cluster by conceptualizing emotion itself as a decolonial force. Their article shows how discomfort, shame, fear, and reflective awareness may become epistemic and political energies through which teachers confront coloniality and move toward re-existence.

The issue then turns to emotions in social and institutional contexts, showing how affect is inseparable from the conditions in which teaching and learning occur. Roxo and Colombo-Gomes examine the relationship between emotions and violence in school through accounts from ninth-grade students. Their analysis reveals that emotions emerge not only within situations of violence, but also within the discursive regimes that make some forms of suffering visible and others inaudible. By exposing processes of silencing and subalternization, the article argues for a more ethically committed understanding of school conflict, one that recognizes emotional life as central to educational relationships. This shift from teacher education as an internal process to teacher education as a response to school realities is important in the

economy of the dossier. It reminds readers that the preparation of language teachers cannot be separated from the emotional and political texture of the institutions in which they will work.

A third group of contributions brings emotions, decoloniality, and social justice into direct conversation. Reis Ribeiro and Silva, writing from the context of Quilombola School Education in the Marajó region of the Amazon, show how fear, hope, pride, and empathy shape pedagogical practices and support situated curricular reorganizations. Their study makes visible the interrelation between affect, territory, and social justice, while also foregrounding decolonial gestures that strengthen community knowledge and quilombola identities. Santos and Gomes da Silva similarly address language teaching as a site of transformation through their discussion of anti-racist Spanish teaching in a public high school in João Pessoa. Their action-research project demonstrates the potential of language education to foster racial literacy, challenge linguistic racism, and value Afro-descendant linguistic and cultural knowledge. Andreatta and Saraiva, in turn, examine an extension-based teacher education experience in prison units in Amazonas. Their article shows how literary practices in prison can create spaces for listening, dialogue, and critical reflection, expanding ethical and social horizons in teacher formation. Across these contributions, language teacher education appears not as neutral training, but as a practice of encounter, accountability, and curricular reorientation.

The final movement of the issue widens the lens to structural and critical perspectives. Oliveira and Luterman analyze the discursive silencing of homosexuality in English language textbooks approved by the 2024 Programa Nacional do Livro Didático (PNLD; National Program of Textbooks) and reveal how exclusionary regimes of truth continue to circulate through curricular materials. Their study offers a powerful reminder that language teacher education must also prepare teachers to read absences, erasures, and controlled visibilities in the pedagogical resources they inherit and use. Moreira deepens this structural discussion by addressing language teacher education through the lenses of social justice, socio-emotional dimensions, educational equity, and Southern epistemologies. By questioning the coloniality of knowledge in school curricula and proposing *escrivência* and literacies of re-existence as pathways toward curricular decolonization, the article offers an important pedagogical horizon for the field.

The issue closes with Moreira and Pereira's discussion of the praxiologies of English language teachers in public schools in Goiás. Their analysis is especially valuable because it resists idealization. The praxiologies they examine are shown to be situated, contradictory, and unfinished. They articulate theory and practice in ways that seek social justice and sociocultural

contextualization, yet they also reveal the persistence of more functionalist understandings of interculturality and the difficulty of enacting stronger decolonial practices in everyday school life. Ending the dossier here is particularly effective. Rather than offering closure in the form of certainty, the issue closes by underscoring that language teacher education remains an open, ongoing, and contested project. What these articles collectively make clear is that the work of preparing language teachers today requires attention not only to methods and content, but also to emotions, ethical relations, epistemic struggles, and the uneven conditions under which more just forms of teaching may be imagined and enacted.

### **Final thoughts**

As we conclude this special issue, we do not offer a finished model for language teacher education, nor do we seek to resolve the tensions that animate the field. Instead, we invite readers to remain with those tensions critically, ethically, and relationally, recognizing that the work of preparing language teachers is inseparable from broader struggles over justice, memory, language, and human dignity. By bringing social justice, emotions, and decoloniality into sustained dialogue, the contributions gathered here reaffirm that teacher education is not only a matter of pedagogical preparation but also of forming subjects capable of reading the world, responding to inequality, and imagining otherwise. It is our hope that this issue will contribute to ongoing conversations at the intersection of applied linguistics and teacher education, while also encouraging forms of inquiry and practice that are more attentive to vulnerability, more accountable to historically marginalized communities, and more committed to building educational futures grounded in care, critique, and transformation.

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