The CATESOL Journal

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Principles and Practices for the Preparation of Antiracist ESOL Teachers

Events in 2020 sparked the need to continue a focus on ongoing inequities in the United States. This article addresses the preparation of ESOL teachers for antiracist work, acknowledging that racist beliefs and structures are pervasive in education and beyond, and how ESOL teachers can develop antiracist *conscientização.* I address questions related to power and privilege that are present in the TESOL field and provide an overview of historically racist practices that have been part of TESOL. I draw on some personal experiences with linguistic racism as a woman, Latina, transnational, immigrant, and self-identified multilingual speaker who speaks English as an additional language to guide why and how I come to this work as a scholar and teacher educator. Drawing from the previous sections, I describe principles and practices to tear down those racist beliefs and structures, build antiracist classrooms, and guide the preparation of antiracist ESOL teachers.

Keywords: Antiracist ESOL teachers, linguistic racism, antiracist *conscientização*, principles and practices

Heightened White nationalism, anti-Black violence, and anti-immigration rhetoric have brought forth the continuing need to focus on ongoing inequities present in the United States. Those who have been historically marginalized in our communities deserve educational opportunities that go beyond just understanding and appreciation. Considering the historical roots of inequality, we are tasked to question our own practices and develop what I call antiracist *conscientização*, following Paulo Freire's (1970) work on activism, education for liberation, and pedagogies of the oppressed.

Acknowledging that racist beliefs and structures are pervasive in education and beyond, this article addresses the preparation of ESOL teachers for antiracist work. I explain how ESOL teachers can develop antiracist *conscientização*. I focus on principles and practices to tear down those beliefs and structures and build antiracist classrooms. I address the following guiding questions:

1. What is linguistic racism and how do we fight against it?
2. What power and privilege are present in the TESOL field?
3. What historically racist practices have been part of TESOL?
4. What principles and practices should guide the preparation of antiracist ESOL teachers?

Using Kubota and Lin's (2006) explanation, "racism can be viewed as both discourse and social practice that construct and perpetuate unequal relations of power through inferiorization, a process in which the Other is rendered inferior to the Self" (p. 478). I contextualize this work in the TESOL field. My

perspectives come from experiences as a transnational individual, originally from Brazil, as someone who has lived in the United States. now longer than I have lived in my home country. I draw on some personal experiences with linguistic racism as a woman, Latina, transnational, immigrant, and self-identified multilingual speaker to guide why and how I come to this work as a scholar and teacher educator. Then, I address questions related to power and privilege that are present in the TESOL field and provide an overview of historically racist practices that have been part of TESOL. Finally, drawing from the previous sections, I describe principles and practices that should guide the preparation of antiracist ESOL teachers.

Theoretical Framework

Linguistic Racism

Linguistic racism is a form of racism related to language discriminatory practices and enactments, in different forms and contexts. De Costa explains that "linguistic racism is amplified when a speaker is multilingual and shuttles between different languages and language varieties because more often than not, her ability to translanguage (Wei 2018) is seen as a liability instead of an asset" (de Costa, 2020, p. 833). Linguistic racism refers to ideologies and practices "utilized to conform, normalize and reformulate an unequal and uneven linguistic power between language users" (de Costa, 2020, p. 834). Linguistic racism has multiple, complex layers embedded in particular social, cultural, political, and educational contexts that affect multilingual speakers' linguistic practices. This concept needs to be examined in relation to the contexts in which multilingual speakers are embedded and in conjunction with work on linguicism and native-speakerism. It is critical, then, to problematize the ideological foundations of linguistic racism and consider the challenges facing immigrant communities, transnational scholars, and international students.

In English language teaching (ELT), linguistic racism can be examined as a common life experience for minoritized individuals who routinely face discrimination based on language proficiency and accent (Liggett, 2014). In addition, connecting ELT to issues of race leads to a shift from a unidimensional approach to complex understanding of difference and power, specifically so as to capture the actual complex realities of identity factors and how their intersectionality makes visible the multiple positionings of individuals in the educational context of language teaching and learning. Certain identities relegate individuals more vulnerable to multiple modes of oppression within social contexts (Crenshaw, 1991). For instance, being Asian and labeled as a nonnative English speaker due to her ethnicity, Kim (2013) reports that employers in South Korea would only give her exam preparation or low-level English classes, regardless of her very high English language proficiency, having spent her childhood and adolescent years in the United States. This explains how certain identities *intersect*—such as ethnicity and language proficiency status—as those perceived as "native speakers" are treated in certain ways, while those perceived as "nonnative speakers" are treated in other ways.

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) helps us understand that it is impossible to explore one dimension of identity without including other dimensions. Using an intersectionality approach requires an exploration of how the different dimensions actually interconnect. These interconnections also relate to the need to move away from dichotomous thinking, which emphasize opposites, to inclusive thinking with an emphasis on a multitude of positions (Hill-Collins,1993). Therefore, in considering linguistic racism, we connect various identities as a collection of positions, narratives, and discourses constructed from relationships and experiences.

Antiracism

Antiracism involves practices of identifying and opposing racism by challenging and changing values, structures, and attitudes that perpetuate systemic racism and implementing policies which actively oppose oppression in its many forms. Antiracism includes consideration of various forms of oppression, including discrimination based on language, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and class, for example. I operationalize antiracist pedagogy as actively rejecting "the institutional and structural aspects of race and racism and explains how racism is manifested in various spaces, making the social construct of race visible" (King & Chandler, 2016, p. 4).

An antiracist pedagogy recognizes the role of educational institutions, practices, and people in producing and reproducing racial inequality. It offers the classroom as a place to explore the effects of racism. In ELT, an anti-racist pedagogical frame ensures that students are actively considering the power dynamics behind the valuing of English language development, the inequalities found throughout the second language learning process, and the repercussions that adding an additional language considered a "language of power" creates for various racialized groups (Curtis & Romney, 2006).

Conscientização

Conscientização is an act of knowing through which a person is able to look critically at the world and act upon it (Freire, 1970). We as human beings can be active change agents able to transform the world as part of praxis in action, a critical reflective stance that helps us constantly reflect on actions to improve our world. Part of the process of *conscientização* is learning to observe social, political, and economic contradictions and act against oppressive environments (Freire, 1970).

Within literacy education more generally, and language teaching specifically, we can see how the process of *conscientização*, critical consciousness achieved through action, reflection, and analysis, goes beyond an idea of perfection in pedagogy to consider oppressive systems (Barros & de Oliveira, in press). In ELT, bringing together the goal of antiracist pedagogy and the process of *conscientização* has the potential to lead to meaningful social transformation, thus improving persisting educational disadvantages. More specifically, because language has the power of helping us think and see the world in different ways, it deserves special recognition as we consider hierarchies, identities, and self-concepts in the context of antiracism.

A Narrative of Linguistic Racism in Action

I now turn to a personal narrative to contextualize the need to prepare antiracist ESOL teachers. Building upon critical race theory's emphasis on using narratives to illuminate and explore racialized experiences (Solórzano, & Yosso, 2002), I (re)create an experience I had in a Master's of Arts program in English, with an emphasis in TESOL, in the late 1990s. Coming from the premise that "awareness and self-reflection of their [our] social position is important in implementing anti-racist pedagogy" (Kishimoto, 2018, p. 542), I offer this narrative to explore experiences of oppression and how they led me to where I am today, as an individual and a scholar in TESOL.

> This happened in late 1990s, in my second year as a MA TESOL student at a public state university in California. The MA in English program at this university was divided into two concentrations: English composition and TESOL. There were specific sophomore and junior-level writing courses offered for both students who grew up in English environments and who spoke English at home, so-called "native" English speakers, and the same courses for students who were in the process of learning English, so-called "non-native" English speakers. I had taught two sections of the

writing courses for “non-native” English speakers. I was the only one in the MA program with over five years of teaching experience, most in my home country, and a licensed secondary English teacher. The TESOL Program coordinator and an associate professor at the university at the time, a transnational scholar from Japan, recommended me to teach a writing course for “native” English speakers, a section that had opened up. Typically, those sessions were taught by the students who were doing their practicum experience or lecturers in the English composition concentration, but that particular quarter [the university was on the quarter system at the time] nobody was available. The coordinator of composition, a White woman, at the time was the one who assigned instructors for the “native” writing sections. She told the TESOL program coordinator that I was “not able” to teach the course because of my “non-native” English speaker status. Upon learning about this, The TESOL program coordinator went to the then Department Chair, the first Black person to graduate with a PhD in Linguistics from Stanford University. He went to speak with the composition coordinator and told her that he was going to give me the class to teach.

I was 22 years old. Recounting this episode always brings me pain. It was my first explicit experience with linguistic racism. I worked so hard on that class and the students all really appreciated having me as an instructor, actually BECAUSE of my experiences learning English as an additional language. They felt that my explanations were all excellent and I knew how to explain certain writing expectations like no other instructor they had had at the university. That same semester, I received the highest course evaluations out of the entire composition and TESOL writing classes, and though I was very proud of myself, I also could not help but think about the entire experience as something extremely painful. I also thought had it not been because of the advocacy by the TESOL program coordinator and the Department Chair, things could have turned out very differently.

This episode also served as an example of how a Chair can identify and address discriminatory practices by acting to dismantle them. This experience changed my career trajectory and it was then that I decided to take the path to leadership and to hopefully become a department chair one day to fight for and address injustices for scholars of color, like my department chair had done for me. Writing this today brings me to tears, not only because of the pain I felt at the time, but how this experience changed my life. The sense of advocacy that I started to learn at the time has guided my academic trajectory since then. I am glad I had the chance to be a Department Chair and fought for our single-mother faculty to have more flexible schedules, for non-tenure track faculty’s salaries and recognition, for funding for DACA and international students, just to name a few. Now as an Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Graduate Studies at a different university, I continue to focus on advocacy for our faculty, staff, and students and equity has guided everything I do from this experience on in my academic career.

Though the story above has a positive resolution, this experience has stayed with me for such a long time; first, because it was my first real experience with linguistic racism in the U.S.; second, because I was able to see in practice what advocacy for students was like and the role of university leaders to address discriminatory practices; and lastly, because it changed my career aspirations because I wanted to be like the TESOL program coordinator and the Department Chair to address inequities when I saw them. How does the narrative above relate to preparing antiracist ESOL teachers? It is an example of a language ideology that Shuck (2006) calls ‘‘the ideology of nativeness,’’ which emphasizes a division between so-called “native” and “nonnative” speakers of a language whose characteristics can be perceived as mutually exclusive, recognizable, and distinguishable. I would claim that this ideology is a

white supremacist one, a notion that ideas, thoughts, and beliefs of white people are superior than those of people of color. This claim is supported by many years of research that shows that being a "native speaker" of English is often "a proxy of whiteness" (Kubota & Fujimoto, 2013, p. 197). It also is supported by research showing that invisible minorities—those who are White but non-native English speakers—are not as discriminated against as those who are visible minorities—used in Canada to identify individuals who are not White (Amin, 1997).

Power and Privilege in TESOL

Understanding linguistic racism helps us question common practices in the field and look more closely at how power and privilege are enacted in various areas. I start this section by offering some questions for reflection:

1. Who is represented in your teaching materials?
2. What varieties of English are represented in your teaching materials?
3. Which "English" is privileged in your school?
4. Are so-called "native speakers" of English given prominence as role models of language?

The idealized "native speaker" has served as models of language for a long time in the TESOL field, rather than multilingual individuals who have developed strong language skills in more than one language. The bi/multilingual turn (Ortega, 2013), though discussed by many scholars for several years (e.g., May, 2013), is still not a reality in many classrooms. One of the main problems is a monolingual mindset in which English is the only language to be spoken in the EAL classroom, an English-only mentality that has been shown to be problematic. It follows that the "language classroom proposes to develop monolingual competence a second time around in life." (Ortega, 2013, p. 33). There is a significant research base to support multilingual classrooms and assets of multilingual teachers showing that despite efforts that support a multilingual environment as the best for students learning English as an additional language, a monolingual mindset is still prevalent in ESOL classrooms (see Kamhi-Stein & Osipova, 2019). We have also seen a significant shift in support of translanguaging pedagogies over the past several years, showing the benefits of multilingual pedagogies in ESOL and other classrooms (Kleyn & Garcia, 2019).

In language teaching materials, for example, we still do not see multilingual speakers or various English varieties represented. Shifting from "native" models of ELT to considering English as an international language (EIL) has been at the forefront of research to highlight the role of English as the most common second language, utilized for global interactions (Matsuda, 2012). But a continuing focus on countries where English is spoken as the majority language has been in ELT curricula and textbooks making the goal of EIL less prominent and an overemphasis on "native" speakers still the norm (Matsuda, 2012). These practices continue to place value on a white monolingualism and monoculturalism that is just not the reality of our classrooms, schools, and communities.

Interrogating specific ELT practices is important so we can identify power and privilege and who is considered to count and who is not in the field. Constantly asking the question, "how is the TESOL field maintaining relations of inequity and domination in every aspect of the profession?", helps us examine what needs to change in order for us to move towards antiracist pedagogies.

Principles and Practices for the Preparation of Antiracist ESOL Teachers

This section presents some principles and practices to tear down beliefs and structures of white monolingualism and monoculturalism as the preferred norm and build antiracist classrooms. In order to

work to dismantle systemic racism and white supremacy and build antiracist classrooms:

1. Challenge English-monolingual practices and the isolation of English from other languages represented in students' linguistic repertoires.
2. Critically examine, question, and work to change representation in curriculum materials.
3. Use multilingual and diverse individuals as role models of language learning and development.
4. Build classrooms in which students investigate their own intersectional identities with regard to race, language, privilege, and marginalization.
5. Embrace plurilingualism!

To create antiracist ESOL classrooms and apply these principles, teachers need to engage in practices that I call the 6 Rs of antiracist pedagogies: Recognizing, responding, redirecting, reimagining, revitalizing, and restructuring (see Figure 1). Antiracist ESOL teachers engage in ***recognizing*** ways to decenter monolingualism and recenter multilingualism as point of departure in order to value and build pluralistic communities. To decenter monolingualism, we must ***respond*** to current ideologies to move beyond an idealized, White native speaker as the norm and use the classroom as a site to question our own positionalities and the intersectional identities of our students with regard to race, language, privilege, and marginalization, ***redirecting*** attention to these areas. Having multilingual learners use their full linguistic repertoires, including translanguaging, promotes inclusion and plurilingualism in the ELT classroom. The Rs of antiracist pedagogies described here are specific ways through which ESOL teachers can work to dismantle systemic racism towards building antiracist classrooms.

Figure 1

The Six Rs of Antiracist ESOL Pedagogies: Towards Building Antiracist Conscientização

In the context of structural racial and economic inequalities, we need to ***reimagine*** antiracist classrooms that reject the English-monolingual gaze by linking antiracism directly to learning goals. Antiracist ESOL teachers ***revitalize*** their language teaching by questioning their curriculum materials and

supplementing standard curricula with the often-neglected voices, epistemologies, and realities of people of color. Antiracist ESOL teachers need to consider how "dominant ideologies in society drive the construction of understandings and meanings in ways that privilege certain groups of people, while marginalizing others" (Hawkins & Norton, 2009, p. 31).

Questioning curriculum materials involves a series of review questions that may guide teachers in the process. For example, we know that what is taught in classrooms—the *implemented* curriculum—is highly dependent on textbooks and other instructional materials selected for use. These materials affect lesson focus, period of instruction for particular topics, and sequence of tasks. Questions such as the ones next may assist teachers in their revitalization process:

1. Who is represented in ELT textbooks? Native speakers with particular accents?
2. What does this representation say about the ideologies portrayed?
3. What voices are not represented?
4. How could I as a teacher bring in additional voices to my curriculum?
5. How do I decide which voices to add? Consider the backgrounds of your students and your context here.

With a pedagogy of antiracism in TESOL comes opportunities to ***restructure*** in order to (1) connect to real-world issues and problems, (2) examine language learning as an additive process rather than a subtractive one, (3) build solidarity with marginalized groups, and (4) align antiracism with an exploration of linguistic justice. We restructure by refocusing—on what is not present in our curriculum, why this lack of presence should be addressed, how these new ideas should be introduced and discussed, and when these ideas can be highlighted in the classroom. These opportunities have the potential to help teachers and students understand how (English) language learning shapes the broader processes of discrimination and equality. Building an antiracist *conscientização* actively targets liberation and realizes more socially just understandings and constructions of the world while acknowledging the diversity of realities that challenge generalizations and stereotypes. Antiracist ESOL classrooms should create ways for active, collective knowledge-building and exploration in which students collaborate on activities that empathize with those historically marginalized and racialized as "others". To fight white supremacy in ESOL classrooms, we must move beyond focusing on language learning and teaching. We need to attend to "the broader consequences of such language learning, such as the successful acquisition of English apart from the constellation of social, political, and economic factors that produces desires for English, and relatedly for Whiteness and all it represents" (Motha 2020, p. 129).

These principles and practices advocate additive approaches, rather than subtractive, as building on existing pluralistic linguistic repertories rather than replacing so-called "deficits". Such a lens requires us to reimagine the ESOL classroom as a site of *liberation*, as Freire (1970) uses the term, and in more complex ways about our responsibilities as we promote language learning and teaching in antiracist ways.

Conclusion

Antiracist ESOL teachers must raise student awareness of how systems of oppression, including racial bias and linguistic racism, are embedded within schools. These systems limit access to opportunities for

marginalized communities. More than ever before, in the context of White nationalism, anti-Black violence, and anti-immigration rhetoric, it is urgent to engage our students in discussions about intersectional connections between race, language, privilege, and marginalization.

It is important, as I conclude this article, to consider the potential challenges that face antiracist ESOL pedagogies. These challenges include: insufficient textbooks that, despite theoretical advancements in EIL, continue to value and portray a White-centric glorification of "native" speakers; how inequality in the past informs and reproduces contemporary injustices; and the potential social and emotional vulnerability that antiracist ESOL pedagogies may have on teachers who themselves are from historically marginalized groups as they incorporate their positionalities into classrooms. Other challenges, considering supporting students specifically, include the demanding work of helping students understand the genealogy of racism, including linguistic racism; facilitating recognition of the role of racial oppression in shaping marginalized students' lives while also creating safe spaces for empowering them; and creating classroom environments for students to share their stories—like I did my own in this article—and learn from other students' stories.

I recognize that trying to conceptualize antiracist ESOL principles and practices is an ideological and political proposition of deciding how to make antiracism real and meaningful to students, teachers, and schools. Schools can be sites of resistance and transformation, of antiracist *conscientização*, and antiracist ESOL pedagogies offer ways to question traditional, exclusionary conceptions of language learning and teaching.

It is my hope that this piece inspires others to reimagine their ESOL curricula and start considering how to implement an antiracist ESOL classroom that values our multilingual, multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic realities. As I write these final words on the centennial birthday of Paulo Freire, I want to end with his words:

Educação não transforma o mundo.
Educação muda as pessoas. Pessoas mudam o mundo.
Education does not transform the world.
Education changes people. People change the world.

Let's be the kind of people who change the world.

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