

“I don’t want to colonise, but where to draw the line?”: a professional identity transformation in teaching english to indigenous students while co-teaching

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Abstract

This paper inquires into the impact of counter-colonial approaches in a teacher’s identity while co-teaching with an Indigenous educator in an English course designed for Kaingang and Guarani undergraduate students at the State University of Londrina. Situated within a socio-cultural context acknowledging Indigenous perspectives, the research reflects on adapting pedagogy to a counter-colonial manner (Santos, 2015; 2023), avoiding the reinforcement of colonial dynamics. The methodology is grounded in Critical Qualitative Inquiry (Denzin, 2016) and Narrative Inquiry (Hickson, 2016), with data drawn from a semester-long teaching journal. Guided by Delphine’s (2023) analytical narrative and counter-colonial pedagogy (Santos, 2015; 2023), the analysis focuses on self-reflection and questioning pedagogical beliefs, emphasizing the (co)teaching relationship’s evolution and impact on motivation. Results reveal a significant transformation in the teacher’s identity, driven by collaboration, mutual respect, and recognition of the co-teacher’s and students’ identities. This process facilitated professional growth and reinforced the importance of inclusive, equitable environments. The implications suggest that collaborative teaching, anchored in cultural awareness and counter-colonial (Santos, 2015; 2023) frameworks, can foster meaningful and empowering learning experiences for both educators and students in higher education.

Keywords: Ethnic relations; indigenous education; language teaching; pedagogical praxis; reflective practice.

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“Não quero colonizar, mas onde traçar o limite?”: uma transformação da identidade profissional no ensino de inglês para estudantes indígenas em coensino

Resumo

Este artigo investiga o impacto de abordagens contracoloniais na identidade de uma professora durante a experiência de coensino com um educador indígena em um curso de inglês voltado a estudantes de graduação Kaingang e Guarani na Universidade Estadual de Londrina. Situada em um contexto sociocultural que reconhece as perspectivas indígenas, a pesquisa reflete sobre a adaptação da pedagogia para uma vertente contracolonial (Santos, 2015, 2023), evitando o reforço de dinâmicas coloniais. A metodologia fundamenta-se na Investigação Qualitativa Crítica (Denzin, 2016) e na Pesquisa Narrativa (Hickson, 2016), com dados extraídos de um diário de ensino mantido ao longo de um semestre. Orientada pela narrativa analítica de Delphine (2023) e pela pedagogia contracolonial (Santos, 2015, 2023), a análise foca na autorreflexão e no questionamento de crenças pedagógicas, enfatizando a evolução da relação de (co)ensino e seu impacto na motivação. Os resultados revelam uma transformação significativa na identidade da professora, impulsionada pela colaboração, pelo respeito mútuo e pelo reconhecimento das identidades do co-professor e dos alunos. Esse processo facilitou o crescimento profissional e reforçou a importância de ambientes inclusivos e equitativos. As implicações sugerem que o ensino colaborativo, ancorado na consciência cultural e em estruturas contracoloniais (Santos, 2015, 2023), pode promover experiências de aprendizagem significativas e empoderadoras tanto para educadores quanto para estudantes no ensino superior.

Palavras-chave: Educação indígena; ensino de línguas; prática reflexiva; práxis pedagógica; relações étnicas.



“¿No quiero colonizar, pero dónde marcar el límite?": una transformación de la identidad profesional de una profesora en la enseñanza de inglés a estudiantes indígenas bajo la modalidad de co-enseñanza

Resumen

Este artículo indaga en el impacto de los enfoques contracoloniales en la identidad de una profesora durante la práctica de co-enseñanza con un educador indígena en un curso de inglés diseñado para estudiantes de grado Kaingang y Guaraní en la Universidad Estadual de Londrina. Situada en un contexto sociocultural que reconoce las perspectivas indígenas, la investigación reflexiona sobre la adaptación de la pedagogía hacia una forma contracolonial (Santos, 2015, 2023), evitando el refuerzo de las dinámicas coloniales. La metodología se basa en la Investigación Cualitativa Crítica (Denzin, 2016) y la Investigación Narrativa (Hickson, 2016), con datos obtenidos de un diario de enseñanza semestral. Guiado por la narrativa analítica de Delphine (2023) y la pedagogía contracolonial (Santos, 2015, 2023), el análisis se centra en la autorreflexión y el cuestionamiento de las creencias pedagógicas, enfatizando la evolución de la relación de (co)enseñanza y su impacto en la motivación. Los resultados revelan una transformación significativa en la identidad de la docente, impulsada por la colaboración, el respeto mutuo y el reconocimiento de las identidades del co-profesor y de los estudiantes. Este proceso facilitó el crecimiento profesional y reforzó la importancia de entornos inclusivos y equitativos. Las implicaciones sugieren que la enseñanza colaborativa, anclada en la conciencia cultural y en marcos contracoloniales (Santos, 2015, 2023), puede fomentar experiencias de aprendizaje significativas y empoderadoras tanto para educadores como para estudiantes en la educación superior.

Palabras clave: Educación indígena; enseñanza de lenguas; práctica reflexiva; praxis pedagógica; relaciones étnicas.



Setting the stage — a journey of reflection and transformation

In the last decade, the teaching of the English language in Brazil has become mandatory, and the only second language taught in our public education system, starting at the 6th grade, as stated in the National Common Core Curriculum¹ (BNCC) (Brasil, 2018). Furthermore, there have been ongoing discussions (Pinho, 2017; Lins Jr, 2018) on such constraints and, more recently, specifically surrounding the possibility of teaching English through decolonial and critical approaches (Marson, 2021), including when working with Indigenous students (Rodrigues, Albuquerque and Miller, 2019; Orlando, 2021; Beato-Canato *et al.*, 2022; Bomfim *et al.*, 2023; Miller and Crookes, 2023; Mota-Pereira, 2024).

Among the Brazilian public policies for the education offered to its Indigenous population, higher education institutions have designed advisory boards to promote access and permanence. One example is the University Commission for Indigenous Peoples (CUIA) at the *Universidade Estadual de Londrina* (UEL), which primarily aims to support and promote the inclusion of Indigenous² students within the university, ensuring they have the necessary conditions for a successful academic journey. Their work encompasses the development of affirmative action policies, guidance on administrative matters of the university, provision of pedagogical and psychological support, and the organisation of activities that value, respect, and integrate Indigenous cultures.

On top of that, for the past ten years, the Intercultural Cycle of Academic Initiation for Indigenous Students (CICLO) — one of CUIA’s initiatives — has been dedicated to welcoming and integrating newly admitted Indigenous students at UEL. CICLO’s goal is to,

“promote the broad and intercultural academic education of indigenous students entering undergraduate courses at UEL, through interdisciplinary educational practices and contribute to the affirmation, respect and visibility of the indigenous presence in the academic environment” (Universidade Estadual de Londrina, 2013).



The year-long CICLO is organised into three fields (Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Portuguese Language), and adopts a problem-solving and critical reflection approach to developing the critical thinking skills of the students (UEL, 2024).

These efforts are aligned with broader research on teaching Indigenous students, which highlights the interconnected importance of identity, motivation, inclusion, and counter-coloniality. Within the corpus on English teaching research, Beato-Canato *et al.* (2022) and Bomfim *et al.* (2023) emphasise affirming Indigenous identities through culturally relevant materials and inclusive policies, while Pimenta (1997) and Santos (2015) stress the evolving role of the professional identities of the educators in addressing historical inequities.

Building upon these discussions, the role of motivation and inclusion emerged as central to providing a counter-colonial (Santos, 2015, 2023) educational framework that affirms Indigenous identities and challenges historical inequities. Motivation, as Munns, Martin, and Craven (2008) argue, is shaped by students’ sociocultural realities and inclusive classroom environments, aligning with Norton’s (2000) perspective on motivation as a socially constructed process. Inclusion, through counter-colonial (Santos, 2015, 2023) pedagogies, advocates embracing Indigenous knowledge systems and implementing plurilingual approaches and affective strategies (Orlando, 2021). Finally, Miller and Crookes (2023) underscore the importance of integrating Indigenous epistemologies and participatory research to create decolonial curricula that challenge traditional, colonial dynamics in education.

Such a scenario has opened the opportunity to include an English course in CICLO. At UEL, English is often regarded as a pathway to internationalisation and is part of the curriculum in various programs such as Secretarial Studies, Medicine, Biotechnology, Journalism, Archival Science, Library Science, and Chemistry. As the lingua franca of the academic world (Rajagopalan, 2015), CUIA’s representatives deemed that the development of academic literacies in



English could be provided to the Indigenous students enrolled at CICLO. Such a proposal would aim to help them access an array of academic resources regularly available only in English, such as reference books, academic journals, and international conferences. My teaching partner — the first Indigenous student in UEL’s English Language Teaching and Literature program — and I, both in our final year of the program, collaborated with our direct supervisor and a professor representing our department at CUIA to implement and offer a course for Indigenous students at UEL. This course, delivered during the second semester of 2024, served as our final mandatory undergraduate teaching practicum.

Besides that, this paper is informed by my personal experiences and history in English teaching. My English journey — which began just as a financial supplementary activity in 2015 — has been profoundly shaped by my experiences, especially in the past 4 years. Initially self-taught, I later recognised the importance of a pedagogical approach that respects cultural identities. Since starting the English Language and Literature course at UEL in 2021, I have engaged with critical perspectives on inclusive and decolonial pedagogies (Mota-Pereira, 2024). Yet, I have noticed a gap between theoretical frameworks for decolonial education and their actual practical implementation. As Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2003) argues, these theories gain meaning through praxis³, in which the course developed by my teaching partner and I aimed to apply these frameworks in real teaching contexts, focusing on empathy and student authorship (Orlando, 2021).

This academic understanding led me to adopt a counter-colonial⁴ (Santos, 2015, 2023) stance, recognising the importance of resisting colonial practices in education. Teaching English to Brazilian Indigenous students from the Kaingang and Guarani communities in the second semester of 2024 presented unique challenges, given their experiences with colonialism via the Portuguese language. Using a journal as a research tool, this experience report explores



the challenges, misconceptions, and expectations I encountered during that time. As Mussi, Flores, and Almeida (2021, p. 64) noted,

[...] experience “is lived before being grasped by thought, apprehended by reflection, characterized in its components” (Breton; Alves, 2021, p. 3), and that it “awakens the power of knowing” (Menezes, 2021, p. 10). Understanding that learning occurs through lived experience (Kastrup, 2008) and that one “cannot learn from the experience of another unless that experience is relived and made one’s own” (Capozzolo *et al.*, 2013).

The question “How can I adapt my approach to teaching English in a counter-colonial manner, avoiding the reinforcement of colonial dynamics?” guided my reflection, which was grounded in language teaching theories (Hulsebosch; Koerner, 1994; Pimenta; 1997; Norton, 2000; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Dörnyei; Ushioda, 2011; Delphine, 2023) and counter-colonial (Santos, 2015; 2023) approaches, offering new perspectives into how these ideas shaped my teaching of Indigenous students. Nevertheless, the narrative constructions here reflect, more than anything, my development as a teacher navigating a new context and making sense of the experiences when teaching within a co-teaching environment.

This paper is organised into four sections. Following this introduction, the methodology outlines the analytical narrative (Delphine, 2023) and the frameworks guiding my analysis. The main body presents key excerpts from my reflective diaries, analysing co-teaching dynamics and student engagement, along with discussions that connect these findings to relevant literature on co-teaching and counter-colonial pedagogy (Santos, 2015, 2023). The conclusion reiterates the findings and reflects on their implications for my future teaching practice and whoever is reading this text.

Navigating The Path — mapping reflective practice and critical frameworks

This study is grounded in Critical Qualitative Inquiry⁵ (Denzin, 2016) and employed a Narrative Inquiry (Hickson, 2016) framework as its research type. Narrative Inquiry, as outlined by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), allows



us to explore human experiences through the stories individuals share. This approach is particularly relevant in educational research (Hickson, 2016) because it recognises the central role that stories play in making sense of complex phenomena such as teaching and learning.

By utilising the aforementioned framework, my main objective is to inquire about the impact of counter-colonial approaches on my teaching identity within the context of teaching Kaingang and Guarani undergraduate students at UEL. More specifically, I aim to: i) report and analyse my experiences during the course through reflective journaling; ii) investigate how my teaching identity is performed and transformed within the research context over the period of July to December 2024, while reflecting on counter-colonial approaches.

The journal I generated as data for this research was a product of my teaching practicum during the final year of the undergraduate English Language Teaching and Literature course at UEL. This practicum involved offering an intercultural English course blending indigenous narratives, cultural presentations, and language practice through storytelling, translation, and oral activities, promoting linguistic development and cultural exchange. Delivered in a hybrid format, half of the meetings were held online for one hour, while the other half took place on campus for 45 minutes. Initially, 10 students enrolled in the course, but by its conclusion, only one student remained. Consequently, the format shifted to a single, 2-hour-long online session.

All journal entries were recorded a few minutes after a lesson, even if the content of the recording encompassed more days than just the meeting that had just ended. They were recorded within Telegram Messenger, an instant messaging app, in a private group chat that had only me as a member. The Premium version of Telegram⁶ offers transcription for any voice message, which was the tool used to transcribe the recordings, followed by a transcription check manually done by me. By the end of the semester, there were a total of 12 entries, although only eight were elected to be analysed. The first one was selected because it offered a broad view of the beginning, while the other seven



excerpts were chosen for illustrating the tensions that involved my perceptions of authority, equity, and respect within the co-teaching experience.

Like Delphine (2023), I structure my analysis chronologically, using selected excerpts to trace the evolution of my pedagogical stance and decision-making. My approach is inherently dialogical, as I engaged with both my diary’s excerpts and theoretical perspectives — such as counter-colonial frameworks (Santos, 2015, 2023) — to make (personal) sense of these theoretical constructs and how they influenced and transformed my teaching identity. Rather than presenting a rigidly categorised analysis, I employed an iterative process of reflection, revisiting the main critical moments⁷ (Pennycook, 2004). My analytical narrative also functions as a form of critical autobiography, weaving personal experiences with broader discourses. In doing so, I aligned with Delphine’s (2023) approach to theorising praxis through storytelling, foregrounding the complexities of English teaching in Indigenous educational contexts.

Even though the data generation consists of self-recorded journals, I followed ethical practices to ensure integrity, transparency, and respect for the broader educational context. The reflective journals, while focusing on my personal experiences and evolving teaching practices, occasionally referenced classroom dynamics and interactions. To maintain ethical standards, I avoided including identifying details about students or colleagues. Any mention of people was anonymised, and pseudonyms were used where necessary to protect privacy.

Shared territories – unpacking co-teaching

Co-teaching Indigenous students in a university setting has been a deeply emotional and reflective journey, filled with moments of uncertainty, discovery, and growth. This section explores how I navigated the challenges of collaborating with Kairu⁸, balancing cultural sensitivity with professional confidence, and grappling with my own positionality as a white educator.



Through a mix of diary excerpts and reflections based on the existing literature, I unpacked the complexities of working together in the following eight entries.

July 5th

[...] **when we had our first class of our practicum, estágio obrigatório, I got the news that I could work in something completely different from what I was expecting.** I was [first] planning on creating a course for students or either work in the public system [with] a more general course, but then I got the possibility of teaching Indigenous students at the university.

[...] **I didn’t share this with anyone, but at first I was a little scared, afraid of not knowing exactly what to do. And I still feel this sometimes. [...] I believe that the biggest challenge is avoiding colonising the students. Unconsciously even.** I don’t know. Even though they’re just people as other people are people, I feel a gigantic pressure on not doing anything wrong, pushing too hard or forcing down their throat something that shouldn’t be forced.

[...] since then, Kairu and I have been working together [...], we realised that it would be better to split having an online meeting and a face-to-face meeting too. So we meet Mondays online, 2 p.m. for one hour, and then Wednesdays at 6.30 p.m. at the university for 45 minutes. And on top of that, we give them homework that should be 40 minutes long, so they can build their portfolio along the semester. Then, **we also realised that most of them are okay with mixing their ethnicities. It’s just that I don’t want them to think that they were just supposed to talk about that. They can talk about other stuff too, if they want.** So I think it would be good to have, like, **a genre that would focus on learning about other Indigenous identities and cultures. And then a genre that would focus on something that you would work with any student, no matter their identity.**

The excerpt above demonstrates how this journey started out with a complex interplay of excitement, apprehension, and determination as I began planning for my practicum experience. The unexpected opportunity to teach Indigenous students at the university level reshaped my initial expectations and introduced a profound sense of responsibility to approach this role with cultural sensitivity and an awareness of the risks of perpetuating colonising practices, even unintentionally.



Before embarking on my academic career, my teaching practices were shaped by an intuitive alignment with some principles of Postmethod Pedagogy⁸⁹(Kumaravadivelu, 2006): I valued adaptability, learner autonomy, and culturally responsive teaching. However, I did not have the theoretical framework or terminology to define these practices. When I encountered Postmethod Pedagogy during the Applied Linguistics discipline in the second year of the programme, it felt like an articulation of what I had already been striving to achieve in my teaching. Yet, it was only when developing the course that served as the basis for this practicum that I finally saw it truly reflected in my lesson plans. My teaching partner and I designed the course to acknowledge the unique experiences of our Indigenous students, while avoiding assumptions or stereotypes about their identities. We sought to empower students to explore their identities on their own terms through another language.

Furthermore, my collaboration with Kairu added an essential dimension to this process, as we co-constructed a teaching approach that combined online and in-person sessions, aiming to balance accessibility and engagement. The emphasis on portfolio-building, the incorporation of diverse art forms, and the focus on orality reflected key aspects of our undergraduate studies. These included the hands-on experience gained during our mandatory teaching practicum with children, the theoretical foundation provided by our studies in critical pedagogy, and the literature courses that broadened our perspectives on discussing complex topics in the classroom. Our efforts aimed to create a curriculum that valued students’ voices and experiences without imposing rigid definitions of Indigenous identity.

Up until this point, my teaching identity had been shaped by a mix of personal values and academic learning. I focused on ensuring that I respected and celebrated my students’ identities without imposing my own assumptions onto them. At the same time, I remained adaptable and flexible, constantly adjusting lessons to meet their needs as they change.



August 6th

[...] all the students had to read the text either quietly or out loud from their houses to expect the pronunciation. **And that’s when I came across with a first thought.** Not exactly about Kairu’s pronunciation. Because I know he has his way of pronouncing things and that’s it. **Not that he made any mistakes or anything like that, but when he was saying some things... And me, having the eyes of a somewhat experienced teacher, who usually points out improvements that my students can do** on their pronunciation... It reminded me of another thing that happened on another day [...] Kairu was showing me a class that he was making [...] and I saw a very tiny mistake. He wrote light skin and dark skin, because next week, we’re gonna talk about the physical traits of people. And if we point that, as a physical trait, we should say light skinned or dark skin. **But then, I don’t know if it’s my place to correct that.** I also remember that another day, he showed something from a different class of his, there was a mistake, it wasn’t a class that we were working together with, and **I felt like I wanted to correct him, but I held myself.**

I haven’t shared this with him. And I still don’t know if I should or not. I don’t... Ahhh! **This is so frustrating because I don’t want to colonise, but then where to draw a line?** I don’t know where to draw a line. Because he is my colleague. We are on the same level. He’s not a student of mine. He’s a teacher. So I shouldn’t treat him as a student. He has his own agency to prepare his classes. **But there’s a part of me that wants to fix the tiny little mistakes,** and it’s not like I don’t know how to point them out. I really know how to point them out in a not-problematic way, I think. That’s what I expect from myself. **But I don’t know if I should do this or not.**

Only a week into the course, the intricacies of co-teaching and the complexities of power dynamics within this collaborative context surfaced in the excerpt above. A significant moment arose when I experienced an internal conflict rooted in the interplay between professional respect and the inclination to provide feedback. This tension became particularly apparent as I reviewed materials Kairu had prepared for upcoming lessons. While my instinct was to offer corrections, I grappled with the boundaries of our co-teaching relationship, questioning whether such interventions might inadvertently undermine his agency as a colleague and, more importantly, as an Indigenous teacher.



The question *“I don’t want to colonise, but then where to draw a line?”* encapsulates the central tension of this co-teaching experience. It highlights the delicate balance between respecting Kairu’s agency and expertise as an educator and navigating my own instinct to intervene as a more experienced colleague in certain areas. The notion of “drawing a line” resonates with the ongoing challenge of practising counter-colonial pedagogy, as described by Santos (2015, 2023). In this case, avoiding the imposition of hierarchical relationships requires constant reflection on how actions, even well-intentioned ones like offering feedback, might unintentionally perpetuate colonial patterns of dominance. In my reflection, this internal conflict also reveals how deeply ingrained pedagogical practices — such as a focus on error correction — can conflict with efforts to foster equality and mutual respect in a teaching partnership.

My hesitation to correct him was magnified by an awareness of the delicate balance required to establish mutual respect and collaboration, particularly given Kairu’s identity as an Indigenous educator. This awareness stems from my own lived experiences of navigating power dynamics in educational contexts. During my exchange year in Wales, between 2014 and 2015, I often found myself as both a subject of scepticism and admiration. Although I am considered white in Brazil, I was racialised abroad, experiencing moments where my accent became a point of mockery or surprise — such as when I was the only one in a class of almost 100 British students to successfully deliver a seminar that met the professor’s expectations. These experiences shaped my sensitivity to the impact of feedback, how it is delivered, and its potential to either empower or diminish someone’s sense of agency.

This situation echoes El Kadri’s (2019) perspective on co-teaching, where interactions between educators reveal underlying power dynamics and contribute to the negotiation of teaching identities. My reluctance to correct Kairu also intersects with Santos’ (2015; 2023) critique of colonial pedagogies, underscoring the necessity of avoiding actions that might perpetuate unequal



power relations. Reflecting on Hulsebosch and Koerner’s (1994) assertion that educators’ beliefs, identities, and lived experiences significantly shape classroom interactions, I realise that my approach to collaboration mirrors my broader teaching philosophy: fostering inclusive spaces where all voices are valued.

August 15th

I feel like he could interact with the students more, but I also feel that I need to talk about these things to Kairu, you know? **I keep pondering here, but not really bringing anything up to him.** I talked to my supervisor about my concerns, but I think I actually really need to talk to Kairu himself and ask his opinion on it. I also think that I believe I might be overthinking too much. I might be taking this too seriously in a way that is like... **I know that my classmates feel... Hmm, I don’t know, they just feel like I know more and that I have more knowledge, when in fact I just have more experiences.** It’s not that I’m better than anyone else. [...] the issue is that, maybe, Kairu also expects me to bring more to these lessons. Because sometimes he waits for my approval, and that happened today in class.

The demands of navigating interpersonal dynamics in co-teaching while addressing classroom engagement and cultural responsiveness is prominent in the excerpt above. During this period, I became increasingly aware of the importance of open communication with Kairu, particularly regarding our shared teaching practices. Despite discussing concerns with some of my professors, I realised the necessity of addressing these matters directly with Kairu as “learning occurs through shared contribution between coteachers [...] towards mutual learning” (El Kadri, 2019, p. 325). This hesitation, however, was rooted in an internal conflict about my role within the partnership and the broader expectations placed upon me by peers, which reflected my evolving understanding of teacher identity.

As Pimenta (1997) articulates, teacher identity is a dynamic construct shaped by historical, social, and contextual influences. My sense of self as an educator was deeply intertwined with my professional relationships and the perceptions of others. The belief that my experience and knowledge set me



apart from my peers, while not inherently hierarchical, add an extra layer of responsibility that at times felt burdensome. Comments from classmates constantly stressed their perception of me as a more experienced figure, which in turn influenced Kairu’s interactions with me. These dichotomies induced an identity crisis within me, coercing me to navigate the tensions between collaboration and authority, partnership and individuality, and cultural humility versus professional assertiveness.

August 20th

In this class, **I decided to take up the lead**, and it was the **lesson I felt most comfortable with** by the end of it. I put a lot of effort into developing the lesson. I had to cut something out due to time constraints, but we were almost able to do everything that I’d planned. I left some space for Kairu to speak in the end, and he had a good interaction with the students, he said things that I did not ask him to say at all, which was really cool. [...] Everyone interacted, some much more than others. I think it was a fun lesson. **It felt like a fun lesson. But at the same time, I feel bad that I felt better about the lesson because I took over most of it. I need to understand my place better when it comes to co-teaching.**

In the session just briefly described, I chose to step up and guide the lesson, and by the time it concluded, I experienced a level of confidence and ease greater than any I had felt in the course up to that point. I invested significant time and effort into preparing the lesson, although I had to make some adjustments on the spot, as it virtually happens to the majority of lessons planned. I intentionally created space for Kairu to contribute during the latter part of the session, and it was encouraging to see him engage with the students effectively. His contributions, which were unscripted and independent of my instructions, added depth to the class dynamic and highlighted the potential for collaborative teaching.

However, upon reflecting, I noticed a sense of unease stemming from my satisfaction with the lesson. I realised this was partly because I had taken the lead for most of the session. This made me question my understanding of co-teaching and my role within this dynamic. Although Kairu played a meaningful



role, I dominated the structure and flow of the lesson. This realisation prompted me to reflect on my positionality and the balance of power in our teaching partnership.

This brings me closer to Delphine’s (2023) observations into the importance of understanding educators’ evolving identities and positionalities, especially when working within Indigenous environments. Delphine’s (2023) stance on reflective practices, such as maintaining a research journal, emphasises the necessity of being critically aware of how personal teaching strategies can either challenge or perpetuate systemic inequalities. Striking the right balance between taking initiative and fostering collaboration remained a challenge, but it was one I was committed to navigating in pursuit of equitable and culturally responsive exchanges between my co-teacher and me.

August 21st

[...] since I started recording this diary, **I’ve noticed that more and more I focus on the co-teaching aspect, the fact that I am like... Stepping onto Kairu’s place and that, I don’t feel like I belong there. Not that I don’t feel welcomed, but that I feel like I’m in the wrong place.** And then, I decided to finally have a heart-to-heart conversation with Kairu. **I asked him how he felt teaching by my side.** I asked him to be as honest as possible. And then he asked, “What do you mean?” I said: “Oh, aspects, like sharing the class with me. All that.” And he said that when he is teaching at the school with a bunch of unknown students it’s easier [...], but with these Indigenous students, which he knows — they are not his close friends, but he knows them — and he wants them to learn something from it. **It made him more comfortable when he knew he was going to work with me [...].** And then he said that it’s okay that sometimes we cut each other when we are speaking, when we are teaching together. And that when he’s teaching, he is leading the class by himself, he thinks that the lesson is a bit intricate, and **he thinks that my experience makes the class flow more [...],** so I feel like it took a big weight off of my shoulders now.

At the stage of the excerpt above, I became acutely aware of how much I had focused on the dynamics of our co-teaching relationship. I frequently felt as though I was intruding on Kairu’s domain, which, while not a reflection of



being unwelcome, created a sense of disconnection due to my status as a non-Indigenous educator. This sense of misalignment drove me to finally initiate an open and honest conversation with Kairu to understand his perspective on our teaching arrangement. This dialogue was deeply reassuring, as it alleviated much of the internal pressure I had been experiencing.

Reflecting on this exchange, I recognise that my motivation in this co-teaching context has been profoundly influenced by the desire to provide a meaningful learning experience without unintentionally imposing. This resonates with Dörnyei and Ushioda’s (2011) exploration of motivation, which emphasises its dynamic nature and the significant role of social and contextual factors in shaping identity and engagement in language learning. Through this collaborative approach, I have come to understand the importance of shared responsibility — not only in managing the workload, but also in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment for our students.

This experience has triggered me to confront my role and identity as a white educator collaborating with an Indigenous colleague. Despite Kairu’s reassurances, my sense of discomfort stems from a broader awareness of historical and systemic inequities that have often positioned white educators in spaces where Indigenous voices should lead. The privilege I carry allows me to step into spaces with relative ease, while others may face barriers simply due to their identity.

September 23rd

I haven’t been recording for two weeks, and I’m trying to update the experience from the previous four classes, which are the 9th, the 11th, the 16th and the 18th of September. So the 9th and the 11th was the week **we thought we lost hope in our course, and we thought we were going to have to cancel it completely.** And that’s because, on Monday, we had two students in the online class, student 1 and student 2. And student 3 skipped the lesson for the first time, [...] and then on Wednesday she skipped the lesson again. Student 2 gave up on the course, and student 1 was there. She didn’t give up, thankfully. But we were really disappointed with what was happening. The lessons were okay. Kairu and I were managing the interaction really well, I think.



I feel like he constantly asks for my support, and I never ask for his, like, [him] being sure if he’s saying something correctly or not. He checks that with me all the time. But it’s not bothering me anymore. I just don’t want student 1 to think I’m more of a teacher than him because of that. That’s my biggest concern at the moment.

Then, last week, Monday, on the 16th, **we had an online class, one-on-one with student 1, and we were glad that she was still showing up, but we were worried that she might give up.** But she turned her camera on, which was great. I was really excited when she did that. And then on Wednesday, **we had a talk with her about whether to maintain the course or not. And she gave us great insights,** at least for me. I believe Kairu knew everything she was saying, he just didn’t expect her to say that. And for me, **I heard some new things like reasons for Indigenous peoples to learn English.** She came with quite reasonable reasons.

Also, she had to read a piece of homework we gave her. **And she read the first sentence so flawlessly!** She made some mistakes on the following ones, but I was so proud! It was really nice. **And gave us a boost of wanting to continue the lessons.** So we talked to our professor, and we are gonna keep the lessons, I’m excited. **As I told my supervisor, I’m stepping on the most comfortable aspect for me, which is having a one-on-one lesson with a student. It’s more about the co-teaching now,** I think, that it’s going to be at play.

The two weeks leading up to the excerpt above were characterised by significant challenges and moments of reflection on my teaching identity and co-teaching dynamics. The first two lessons described in this excerpt were particularly disheartening, as Kairu and I considered the possibility of cancelling the course. The more students decide to discontinue their studies in the course, the more our concerns intensified. Despite these setbacks, the lessons themselves proceeded smoothly, and we were able to manage the interactions effectively. However, a recurring dynamic in our co-teaching partnership emerged: Kairu consistently sought my validation regarding the accuracy of his contributions. While this no longer troubled me, I became increasingly concerned about how this might be perceived by our remaining student. My primary concern was that she might perceive me as the dominant teacher, which was a source of stress in my identity conflict.



In contrast, the class on the 16th marked a shift in the course’s trajectory. The one-on-one session proved to be a turning point for me. I felt reassured when she turned on her camera, which seemed to indicate a renewed commitment to the course. The subsequent discussion, in which she shared valuable wisdom on the reasons Indigenous students might wish to learn English, highlighted the relevance of our approach. Her reasons for learning English reflected a desire for empowerment and cultural exchange, which aligned with the principles of counter-colonial pedagogy (Santos, 2015, 2023)

Reflecting on these experiences, I recognise how student motivation and engagement evolved over time. Although we lost most of our students throughout the course — later attributed to a lack of time, as further explained in Oliveira (2025) — the increased participation of the remaining student demonstrated the importance of creating an environment where they feel valued, and their identities are respected. This progression also highlighted the dynamic nature of student motivation, as it is often influenced by both the personal relevance of the learning content and the classroom environment.

At this stage, the interchange of identities in the classroom became more apparent, particularly in how Kairu and I navigated our co-teaching roles and the student’s perceptions of our dynamic. My concern about being perceived as the “dominant teacher” underlines a tension between ensuring clarity in our collaboration and allowing his expertise to shine through without overshadowing him.

I find that the shift in the course dynamics, marked by student 1’s active participation and thoughtful contributions, suggests that the conflict between our teaching roles is not escalating but rather transforming. Kairu’s increasing reliance on me for validation, which initially felt burdensome, has begun to serve as an opportunity for me to step back and recognise his autonomy. Meanwhile, student 1’s engagement provided a reminder of the broader purpose of our work: creating a space where Indigenous students can see the value in learning English while feeling respected and empowered.



October 23rd

Today, the professor asked me if I had stopped recording these diaries and yes I did indeed. Mostly because I was... it just changed, you know. After all those struggles it changed, it moved back to my most comfortable zone which is a one-on-one class, but in this case, I have Kairu as a co-teacher with me, and it’s been fine! **I like watching Kairu develop that side of him, and I see myself holding myself a lot in situations I don’t need to correct... I don’t know, it’s not correct, it’s just like sometimes, if Kairu was my student I would definitely correct that, but is that my place? See, the discussion is still here, but it doesn’t bother me any more. I just don’t do this any more, like: “Oh. Should I or should I not?” I just don’t do it at all, which is a change in behaviour.** And after the two interviews I did, **I came to the conclusion that yeah, I have always been an outcast.** They gave the chance to check the course because Kairu was there. He was the pivotal person in this project. But... **It doesn’t feel like I’ve done what I was afraid of doing. So, maybe being so worried from the beginning paid off in the end.**

At the point of the excerpt above, it is evident that the challenges I faced in co-teaching have gradually evolved into a more comfortable, albeit complex, dynamic. After the initial struggles, I found myself in a teaching environment that felt more familiar: a one-on-one classroom. However, this time, the presence of another co-teacher has added a new layer to my teaching identity. The return to this familiar context allowed me to focus more on the teaching and learning process, rather than the uncertainty and discomfort that initially characterised my experience. I appreciated observing Kairu’s growth as a teacher, and, at the same time, I recognise that I was holding myself back from intervening in certain situations that were no longer issues. This marks a significant change in my behaviour, demonstrating my growing ability to adapt to the nuances of co-teaching.

The two interviews briefly mentioned in this excerpt were conducted as part of my collaboration with Kairu to support his research. Through these two interviews, in which I sought to understand students’ perspectives on the English language and their reasons for leaving the course, I came to a profound realisation: I had always been perceived as an outsider by the students. One



particularly striking example was when I asked a student why she had initially joined the course. She explained that, beyond her interest in learning English, a significant factor was the presence of an Indigenous person leading the course.

This experience illustrates the socio-contextual nature of student motivation, particularly in the context of Indigenous education. As Norton (2000) points out, motivation is shaped by the social and historical contexts in which students find themselves. In this case, Kairu’s presence as an Indigenous teacher, along with the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, was essential for increasing motivation and engagement among the students, even if later on they withdrew for other reasons (Oliveira, 2025). However, my pedagogical expertise also contributed to the course’s design and implementation, accentuating the value of collaboration between diverse perspectives. This aligns with Santos’ (2008) concept of an “ecology of knowledges,” which emphasises the plurality and interdependence of different forms of knowledge. In teacher education, this approach involves recognising and valuing the diversity of knowledge systems present in schools — whether theoretical, experiential, or emotional — and integrating the perspectives of teachers, students, and the surrounding community (Santana, 2025). Through inclusive pedagogies, such as those advocated by Santos (2023), I have learned that creating an environment where students feel their identities are affirmed is crucial.

Reflecting on this, I recognise that my earlier concerns, though genuine at the time, may have been overly cautious. While I was not the driving force behind the project, my contributions were still meaningful. This experience has revealed that my teaching identity is not fixed but continually shaped by the context, the people I work with, and the roles I occupy. Being part of this collaboration has challenged me to reconsider my position and influence as an educator, reminding me that effective teaching is often about supporting others’ agency and recognising when to take a step back.



December 2nd

Oh gosh, it has been a month since I didn’t record anything regarding the classes, but at the same time we didn’t have lessons two out of the four weeks, so I should be speaking about the previous two only. I really don’t know why I’m not recording straight away. **I feel like I haven’t had the need to share strong feelings and strong perceptions anymore.** But I just thought that I... What’s the word? Oh my god, there’s a word in both languages. What is it? It’s not interpreted. It’s not interpreted. Okay, I remember it in Portuguese, improvisar! Improvise. So I just, it’s not really improvising, **it was just spontaneous, it was a spontaneous feeling of “I can make this fun during the class.” And then I just turned the scanning session of the lesson into “Who wants to be a millionaire?” questions. We all had so much fun, and I think that was so good.** I have no idea if I’m going to include this in my analysis, but **it makes me feel so good doing something in class as a teacher that makes, like, Kairu either smile or agree. I know he comes after my validation towards English related characteristics. And, at the same time...**

I’m actually crying right now. I’ve just realised how much I ask for his validation on what I’m doing. And I think I’ve been doing this unconsciously all the time. [...] I was not expecting to cry during this internship out of good emotions. Anyway, this was just something I wanted to record for later on, and it ended up becoming something much bigger. **Talking to ourselves is quite liberating, freeing.**

It may seem trivial, but moments like the ones described in the excerpt above are significant to me. Realising that making Kairu smile or show his agreement with my methods made me feel an accomplished teacher. What struck me at that moment of reflection, however, was the realisation that I unconsciously sought his validation in much of what I did in the classroom. This was not something I had expected, and I found myself deeply moved by it. It is strange how much I had relied on this dynamic without fully recognising it in that recording. This disclosure brought me to tears, not out of sadness, but because I had not anticipated such a profound emotional response to this process.



Reflections and horizons – (re)shaping my teaching identity

In order to investigate this journey, I analysed the impact of adopting a counter-colonial Santos (2015, 2023) stance on my teaching identity while co-teaching Kaingang and Guarani undergraduate students at UEL. Analytical narrative’s (Delphine, 2023) iterative approach guided by Narrative Inquiry (Hickson, 2016) served as my primary method. In doing so, I was able to revisit my experiences throughout the semester, documenting and analysing moments of growth, doubt, and clarity.

Looking back on the semester, my teaching journey has been both complex and transformative. Reflecting on who I was at the beginning of this journey, I see a teacher grappling with uncertainty and deeply conscious of the cultural and historical complexities of teaching Indigenous students and co-teacher. My teaching identity was shaped by a desire to balance the authority of my role with an awareness of my positionality as a white, non-Indigenous educator. Early on, I was heavily influenced by the dynamics of co-teaching with Kairu, navigating concerns over dominance coming from me. These moments illuminated my own internalised tensions regarding authority, equity, and respect.

Throughout the semester, several transformative experiences reshaped my perspective. Notable among these were my reflective dialogues with Kairu, the pivotal contributions of our remaining student, and moments of joy and spontaneity in teaching. These encounters, coupled with counter-colonial strategies (Santos, 2015, 2023), shifted my focus from trying to maintain control to embracing collaboration and co-creation. The evolving partnership with Kairu allowed me to step back and appreciate the interplay between his teaching style and my own, ultimately stimulating a more fluid and respectful co-teaching dynamic.

Now, at the end of this journey, I feel more confident and grounded in my teaching identity. I have come to recognise that my role is not to impose,



but to create a space where students and colleagues feel empowered and valued. Reflective practice, facilitated by journaling, has been instrumental in this transformation. As I wrote in my final journal entry — *“Talking to ourselves is quite liberating, freeing”* — this process enabled me to confront both my uncertainties and successes, deepening my understanding of myself as a teacher.

Looking ahead, I aim to continue building not only on this experience, but all the ones yet to come, striving to become a teacher who facilitates meaningful learning while cultivating an environment of mutual respect. Inspired by Freire’s (2005) pedagogy, I understand that teaching is not merely about transferring knowledge, but about navigating interpersonal dynamics and adapting to meet the needs of diverse learners. By sharing this journey, I hope to encourage other educators to embrace reflective practices and challenge themselves to grow within the complexities of teaching. At its heart, this experience has taught me that effective teaching is rooted in humility, collaboration, and an ongoing commitment to inclusivity.

Ultimately, the reflections emerging from this study may foster discussion for teacher education in terms of navigating and openly talking about teaching in culturally-diverse and often marginalized educational settings. By moving away from rigid, Eurocentric pedagogical frameworks that emphasize teaching as a technical skill, this experience demonstrates that teacher education may benefit from addressing the broader, ideologically-oriented implications of teaching, comprehending it as a relational endeavor that aims to emphasize a posture of listening, cultural humility, and collaborative praxis. When future teachers are encouraged to engage with local realities through a counter-colonial lens, they learn to view linguistic and cultural differences not as deficits, but as spaces for shared knowledge production.



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Notes

- 1 The BNCC, named Base Nacional Comum Curricular in Portuguese, is a framework that outlines the essential knowledge and skills all Brazilian students are expected to acquire during their education. Presented by the Ministry of Education in 2017, and established in 2018, it aims to ensure educational consistency and quality across the country. The BNCC specifies learning objectives for each grade level and subject, promoting equity and providing a common reference for curriculum development.
- 2 Since 2001, UEL has had Indigenous students as part of its student body. Currently, there are 43 Indigenous students enrolled at the university. The primary ethnic groups represented are the Kaingang and Guarani. It is important to note that Guarani refers to a broader linguistic and cultural trunk, which encompasses several distinct ethnic subgroups.
- 3 “[...] a basic concept that permeates all of Paulo Freire’s work [...] and can be understood as the close relationship established between a way of interpreting reality and life and the consequent practice that results from this understanding, leading to transformative action” (Rossato, 2010, p. 574) (translated by me).
- 4 Antônio Bispo dos Santos, also known as Nêgo Bispo, was a prominent Afro-Brazilian intellectual, writer, and activist. Known for his work in advocating for the rights of *quilombolas* (descendants of escaped enslaved Africans) and other marginalised communities in Brazil. He coined, in his work *Colonisation, quilombos: modes and meanings* (2015), the idea of counter-coloniality, to refer to himself, the *quilombolas*, and Indigenous people, since, for him, they have not been colonised. Therefore, counter-coloniality operates in the sense of countering colonisation which, for Santos (2015) is still in force. I opted for counter-colonisation, rather than decolonisation, because the terms differ from each other. Decoloniality, as Santos (2015) understands, is for those who have been colonised and need to decolonise themselves. However, I opted for keeping the term “decolonial” when citing research that employs that term.
- 5 Critical Qualitative Inquiry (Denzin, 2016) is an approach to research that emphasises the importance of understanding and addressing social injustices and inequalities. It seeks to challenge traditional research paradigms by recognizing the researcher’s positionality and the influence of power dynamics in the research process.
- 6 As the journal requests declaration of A.I. tools use, we clarify that this technology does not consist of an AI tool. The only use for AI in the production of this text was for the translation of the abstract into Spanish, which was revised by a human proofreader.
- 7 Pennycook (2004, p. 330) defines critical moments as experiences in which “we seize the chance to do something different, when we realize that some new understanding is coming about.”
- 8 The pseudonym “Kairu” was chosen by the co-teacher of this experience and refers to his Kaingang ethnic identity. In Kaingang social organisation, *Kairu* is one of the exogamous moieties that structure society, associated with the East and specific round facial painting patterns. Affiliation to these moieties is patrilineal, passed from father to child, and plays a fundamental role in the social and cultural dynamics of the Kaingang people (Veiga, 2006).



- 9 “[...] post-method pedagogy recognizes teachers’ prior knowledge as well as their potential to know not only how to teach but also how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula and textbooks” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 178).



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