

Introduction

Pedagogies of Harmonies as Critical Love in English Language Education

Pedagogias das harmonias como amor crítico no ensino de língua inglesa

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Abstract: As societies confront ongoing global instability, English language education faces an urgent responsibility to prepare learners not only for academic success but also for ethical, relational, and human engagement in an uncertain world. Language functions as a powerful medium through which individuals negotiate identity, connection, justice, and belonging, positioning it at the heart of pedagogical transformation. Yet, if language shapes how people make sense of (in)stability, (in)justice, and one another, English language education must move beyond skills-based instruction toward pedagogies grounded in care, relationality, and ethical responsibility. In this special issue, we bring together the concepts of pedagogies, harmonies, and critical love to advance pedagogies of harmonies as a justice-oriented, relational approach aimed at collective healing. Pedagogies of harmonies foreground empathy, inclusivity, and critical engagement with systems of inequity while honoring the complexities of human connection across differences. As editors, our hope is that this special issue sparks sustained dialogue that transcends the boundaries of English language education, advocating for pedagogical practices that cultivate empathy, unity, and meaningful intercultural engagement. By centering pedagogies of harmonies as critical love, this issue invites educators to imagine and enact more humane, just, and connected educational futures.

Keywords: pedagogies of harmonies; critical love;
English language education; human connection.



Resumo: À medida que as sociedades enfrentam uma instabilidade global contínua, o ensino da língua inglesa assume uma responsabilidade urgente de preparar os aprendizes não apenas para o sucesso acadêmico, mas também para um engajamento ético, relacional e humano em um mundo incerto. A linguagem funciona como um poderoso meio pelo qual os indivíduos negociam identidade, conexão, justiça e pertencimento, posicionando-se no centro da transformação pedagógica. No entanto, se a linguagem molda a forma como as pessoas compreendem a (in) estabilidade, a (in)justiça e umas às outras, o ensino da língua inglesa precisa ir além de uma instrução baseada em habilidades e avançar em direção a pedagogias fundamentadas no cuidado, na relacionalidade e na responsabilidade ética. Neste número especial, articulamos os conceitos de pedagogias, harmonias e amor crítico para desenvolver as pedagogias das harmonias como uma abordagem relacional orientada para a justiça e voltada à cura coletiva. As pedagogias das harmonias destacam a empatia, a inclusão e o engajamento crítico com sistemas de desigualdade, ao mesmo tempo em que reconhecem as complexidades das conexões humanas através das diferenças. Como editores, esperamos que este número especial estimule um diálogo contínuo que transcenda os limites do ensino da língua inglesa, promovendo práticas pedagógicas que cultivem empatia, unidade e um engajamento intercultural significativo. Ao centralizar as pedagogias das harmonias como amor crítico, este número convida educadores a imaginar e a concretizar futuros educacionais mais humanos, justos e conectados.

Palavras-chave: pedagogias das harmonias; amor crítico; ensino da língua inglesa; conexão humana.

1 Introduction

Today, more than ever, we – as educators – find ourselves in a moment where instability is the new and accepted norm worldwide (e.g., Fridrikh; Antonenko; Kasatkina-Kubyschkina, 2025; Schvarcz et al., 2025). This instability, however, is not a recent occurrence: children, youth, and adults alike have been witnessing escalating conflicts, climate change, pandemics, and

injustices for years, which have contributed to a “dramatic decline in mental wellbeing with each younger generation” (Thiagarajan; Newson, 2023, p. 2). In this context, language serves as an active and dynamic process of communication, playing a crucial role as a mediator that shapes and reflects our experiences, emotions, and interactions (Drabarz; Kałużny; Terrett, 2017). Consequently, language becomes a powerful tool for expressing identity, fostering connections, navigating the complexities of our globalized world, and becoming the ‘heart’ of transforming educators and their classrooms into pedagogies of harmony and demonstrating critical love. However, if language is central to how individuals make sense of (in)stability, (in) justice, and one another, then English language education must move beyond instruction focused solely on academic skills and toward pedagogical orientations grounded in care, relationality, and ethical responsibility.

In response to these realities, scholars have increasingly turned to frameworks that foreground love as a critical, justice-oriented stance in education (Vanderheiden; Claude-Hélène; Barcelos, 2025). Within this scholarship, critical love is understood as a pedagogical and ethical commitment that centers self-inquiry, care, empathy, and relationality without relinquishing a critical interrogation of the social, cultural, and institutional systems that reproduce inequity, exclusion, and harm (Trinh; Oliveira; Andrade, 2024). Critical love asks leaders and educators to “embrace beauty, a sense of guard, protection, nurture, kindness, respect, belonging, resistance, and rebellion” (Trinh; Oliveira; Andrade, 2024, p. 183) to promote a culture of belonging and inclusivity for all identities in professional spaces in English language teaching. As societies grapple with the need to adapt to the multitude of global shifts, education systems continue to face the pressing task of preparing learners for an era marked by rapid change and unpredictability, while reckoning with past traumas and planning for future uncertainties. As such, the rising demands on education to cultivate critical thinking, resilience, adaptability, and especially love reflect a deeper understanding that knowledge must be accompanied by the capacity to navigate complex social and environmental landscapes, with emotional depth and resilience, to “enact the embodiment of care, empathy, and compassion for others while also critically examining the systems and structures that perpetuate discrimination and oppression” (Trinh; Oliveira; Andrade, 2024, p. 186).

It is within these broader societal and educational shifts that the field of English language education finds its call to action, seeking relevance and responsiveness to the emergent needs of diverse populations. As educators, our response to this call must be grounded in innovation and a commitment to developing inclusive, responsive, and holistic pedagogies that mirror our global community’s interconnectedness. From asking questions like “How do we language so people stop killing each other” (Inoue, 2019, p. 352), to proposing innovative practices and pluriversal perspectives (Ortega, 2025), such as pedagogical love (Barcelos, 2023), restorative literacy (Kelenyi; Luangpipat; Vieira, 2020), critical language awareness (Shapiro, 2022; Park *et al.*, 2025), social-emotional learning (Hasper; Pentón Herrera, 2024; Pentón Herrera; Martínez-Alba, 2021), or queering classrooms to build allyship with one another (Paiz, 2020; Trinh, 2020; Trinh; Reynolds; Coda, 2024), we have begun to move towards more socially-just, asset-based, and emotionally-intelligent conversations in an effort to respond to our present and future needs. Vanguard approaches and discussions leading this movement at the intersection of English and social justice have delved into the topics of peace(building) (Birch, 2002; Pentón Herrera; Trinh; Park, 2023), restoration (Pentón Herrera; McNair, 2021; Winn, 2013), and more recently, hope (Heise, 2023; Silva; Lee, 2024),

love (Trinh; Oliveira; Andrade, 2024; Vanderheiden; Claude-Hélène; Barcelos, 2025), and humanizing education (Jain; Chen; Trinh, 2026; Tigert *et al.*, 2022), concluding that language can be a tool for radical healing and unity (McNair; Pentón Herrera, 2022; Pentón Herrera; Trinh; Gómez Portillo, 2022; Winn, 2013). These progressive dialogues have prompted us to recognize that a pedagogy of harmony and love should lie at the heart of English language education.

The concept of harmony has been previously introduced by leading scholars in our field (Birch, 2002; Curtis, 2022; Oxford, 2013), but remains largely unexplored to date. Co-existing at the confluence of tensions and peace, harmony is the delicate balance enabling disparate entities to find common ground, turning discord into accord. At the same time, the concept of harmony needs to be situated to challenge the status quo and power issues inherent in the educational landscape (Park *et al.*, 2023; Shapiro, 2022). According to Harrison and Kruszona (2024, para. 9), harmony “connects notions of beauty and peace by tying ideas about proportion and the correspondence of constituent parts within a beautifully unified entity to the minimization of conflict via rules of society and government”. This means that, if something or someone is considered to be harmonious, “then the elements that are combined to create the singular entity are experienced as ‘fitting together’ in some precise and worthwhile manner” (Harrison; Kruszona, 2024, para. 9). Although difficult to subsume or define, most scholars across disciplines agree that harmony is closely connected to stability, happiness, justice, and dignity (Silva; Lee, 2024). It fosters constructive, respectful, and welcoming relationships between our emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual selves to form wholeness, wellness, and authenticity (Mason, 2022). In this sense, harmony as critical love builds on a longer tradition of pedagogies of love (e.g., Barcelos; Coelho, 2016; Vanderheiden; Claude-Hélène; Barcelos, 2025), which position love not as sentimentality, but as an ethical, relational, and justice-oriented pedagogical stance.

Amid the backdrop of global challenges and the diverse needs of learners, harmony stands as a pivotal force in fostering an environment where learning transcends mere linguistic acquisition to cultivate empathy, mutual respect, and cultural awareness. In addition, the co-creation of harmony as critical love generates a space of togetherness for all identities to emerge (Trinh; Reynolds; Coda, 2024), thereby building bridges and fostering allyship despite differences. As we navigate these turbulent times, the call for pedagogies addressing linguistic skills and broader social-emotional competencies has never been more urgent (Darragh; Pentón Herrera, 2026; Pentón Herrera; Darragh, 2024). Scholars such as Brackett (2020) and Gay (2018) have highlighted the transformative power of an education that integrates emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity, underscoring the vital role these elements play in fostering global citizenship and peace. We believe that embedding the principles of harmony and love into English language education can enhance individuals’ ability to communicate across cultures and perspectives while empowering them to act as agents of change in a world that increasingly requires understanding and collaboration. As such, engaging in a collective discussion about embedding harmony in English language education is – in our view – the foundational pillar for building a more just, peaceful, and interconnected global community.

Acknowledging the multiple viewpoints and perspectives on harmony (Mason, 2022; Yeung, 2020), in this special issue, we define harmony as the synergistic convergence of diverse voices, perspectives, and experiences, fostering an educational community where

every individual feels valued and heard, thus creating a platform to amplify their (silent and invisible) voices and experiences. For us as editors, we begin by aligning our perspectives with those of Harrison and Kruszona (2024), who employ the terms *pedagogies over pedagogy* and *harmonies over harmony* to normalize and acknowledge the different perspectives, significances, and parallel forms of thinking, thus lending greater precision to exploring and conceptualizing pedagogies of harmonies in English language education. Thus, for us, harmony represents a dynamic equilibrium where conflicts and differences are actively transformed into opportunities for growth, understanding, mutual respect, and critical love (Trinh; Oliveira; Andrade, 2024). This conceptualization of harmony emphasizes the active engagement of all community members in co-creating an inclusive, empathetic, and supportive English language field. Further, it underlines the process through which learners, scholars, and educators collaboratively navigate the complexities of English language education, guided by principles of love, respect, and shared humanity.

Inspired by our past individual and collective work (e.g., Pentón Herrera; Trinh; Park, 2023) as well as the ongoing socio-cultural-political events worldwide, we bring together this special issue. As we reconcile our positionalities in today's world, this special, timely, and much-needed issue seeks to emphasize harmonies as critical love and collective healing. As editors, our hope and desire is that the contents of this issue spark a much-needed open dialogue that transcends the present boundaries of language education, advocating for an approach that prepares individuals for academic success and a life of empathy, unity, and meaningful interaction across cultures.

2 Contributions

The contributions in this special issue take up the call to enact pedagogies of harmonies as critical love across diverse contexts, positionalities, and methodological approaches. Collectively, contributors explore how harmony, love, and justice can be lived, practiced, and sustained in English language education, attending to the emotional, ethical, and political dimensions of teaching and learning. The articles that follow offer theoretical insights, empirical investigations, and pedagogical reflections that invite readers to imagine and engage English language education as a site of collective care, resistance, and healing.

In the first article, Luis Javier Pentón Herrera, Ana Maria Ferreira Barcelos, and Yasir Hussain introduce the concept of *affective multiliteracies* as a timely and humanizing framework for English language education. Responding to the growing emphasis on multimodal, digital, and performative literacies, the authors argue that contemporary approaches often privilege what they term *outer literacies* while sidelining the *inner* or *affective literacies* that shape how learners feel, relate, and make meaning. Drawing on scholarship in social and emotional learning (SEL), pedagogical love, and harmony, this article advances a holistic reconceptualization of literacy as both internal meaning-making and external participation. Through a theoretically grounded discussion supported by pedagogical illustrations, the authors demonstrate how affective multiliteracies can help educators cultivate learning environments that honor students as whole human beings. Positioned at the intersection of literacy studies, affect, and ethics, this contribution invites readers to rethink literacy as a relational, ethical, and humanizing practice grounded in pedagogies of harmonies and

critical love, which is essential for thoughtful communication and meaningful participation in today's complex world.

In the second article, Anna Becker introduces *Englishes as Linguae Harmonicae* (ESLH), a theoretical and pedagogical framework that reorients English language education toward relational ethics, affective attunement, and decolonial responsibility. Moving beyond established paradigms such as English as a Lingua Franca, World Englishes, and Global Englishes, Becker proposes harmony not as convergence or standardization, but as co-resonance across linguistic, cultural, and epistemic difference. Drawing on pluriversal and postcolonial scholarship, the article foregrounds questions of dignity, healing, and ethical presence in response to the historical and ongoing harms associated with English in global contexts. Through the sustained use of musical and restorative metaphors, Becker articulates a praxiology of English teaching grounded in dialogical listening, relational accountability, and ethical co-creation. By imagining classrooms as dynamic soundscapes rather than neutral or standardized spaces, the article invites educators to reconsider what it means to teach and learn English in ways that foster belonging, justice, and shared humanity.

In the third article, Sender Dovchin, Rhonda Oliver, and Lissy Jackson examine how trauma-informed pedagogy in English language teaching can be strengthened through what they conceptualize as a *translingual yarning pedagogy* in an Australian Aboriginal boarding school context. They discuss how a *translingual yarning pedagogy* may create a safe space where Aboriginal youths can freely engage in *yarning circles* (Ober; Dovchin; Oliver, 2024) – integral to Australian Indigenous ways of talking and deep listening for developing cultural understanding. Yarning circles are a culturally shared discursive and oral construct of the lived experiences of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their ancestors, Elders, kinship, families, and communities (Ober; Dovchin; Oliver, 2024). Yarning circles are complemented by *translingualism* and its analytic framework – *translanguaging* – to allow Aboriginal students to confidently articulate their meaning-making practices, with increasing freedom to use their full linguistic repertoire (Dovchin *et al.*, 2026).

Attending to the enduring impacts of intergenerational trauma and the linguistic realities of Aboriginal students who navigate Aboriginal English, creoles, Indigenous languages, and Standard Australian English, the authors argue that healing-centered learning requires more than English-only approaches to care. Drawing on ethnographic classroom observations, yarning conversations, and students' art-making, the article illustrates how yarning circles create relational, culturally safe spaces where students can draw on their full translingual repertoires to make meaning, tell stories, and reclaim voices. Ultimately, this contribution positions translingual yarning pedagogy as a harmony-based classroom practice that nurtures belonging, agency, and linguistic-cultural dignity amid trauma-affected educational conditions.

In the fourth article, Hamisu Hamisu Haruna, Azza Jauhar Ahmad Tajuddin, Nur Salina Ismail, and Ibrahim Bashir examine the determinants of English language achievement among Nigerian secondary school students, particularly those in high-security-risk environments. Grounded in the intersections of SEL, teacher empathy, and peace-building practices, the study investigates how these psychological and pedagogical constructs influence linguistic outcomes. Using structural equation modelling (SEM), the researchers identify a harmonious classroom climate as a critical mediating factor bridging the gap between teacher-led affective practices and student achievement. The article also explores the moderating role of

student engagement, revealing the complex, multi-layered dynamics required for successful language acquisition in resource-constrained and conflict-affected contexts. By integrating affective and social factors with advanced statistical analysis, this contribution offers a robust theoretical and methodological framework for understanding language learning in post-conflict settings. Ultimately, the article provides actionable insights for educators and policymakers, advocating humanizing and restorative approaches that foster belonging and academic equity amid ongoing socio-political challenges.

In the fifth article, María Matilde Olivero explores the role of inner peace in language teacher education through a multi-case study of English as a foreign language pre-service teachers participating in an Inner Peace Intervention during a practicum course in Argentina. Focusing on pre-service teachers' lived experiences, the study examines how inner peace is understood, developed, and enacted in pedagogical contexts. The findings show that participants conceptualized inner peace as a dynamic and relational construct inherently related to well-being, professional development, and classroom practice. Inner peace was perceived as central for ethical decision-making, emotional regulation, and the creation of supportive learning environments. The article argues for the integration of inner peace as a key dimension of teacher well-being and peacebuilding education. The study contributes to the special issue by highlighting harmony-based pedagogies as a means to prepare future language teachers not only to teach effectively but also to thrive professionally and foster peace in broader social contexts.

In the sixth and final article, Quanisha Charles and Manar Abdullah examine how pedagogies of harmony and the e-LOVE framework – Liberation, Openness, Vulnerability, and Equity – create transformative possibilities within multilingual English language education. Using duoethnography as both method and praxis, the study analyzes dialogic exchanges between an African American professor and an Iraqi American student to illuminate how cultural background, linguistic identity, and institutional power shape relational dynamics in academia. Their collaborative reflections demonstrate how moments of cultural and linguistic misunderstandings can become sites of relational repair when approached through intentional dialogue and care-centered practices. By grounding the analysis in lived experience, the article shows how harmony-centered and love-centered pedagogies affirm multilingual identities, challenge deficit-based assumptions, and foster learning environments grounded in emotional safety, mutual respect, and trust. The study positions e-LOVE as an embodied relational practice that reshapes teacher–student interactions and expands possibilities for more equitable pedagogical relationships. Ultimately, it argues that duoethnography offers a transformative framework capable of guiding educators toward more relationally responsive and equity-driven approaches in multilingual contexts.

3 Final Thoughts

As justice-minded language educators, we recognize that this special issue represents neither an endpoint nor a solution, but an opening and one of many possible entry points for responding to the complex and often painful realities shaping educational spaces worldwide. Pedagogies of harmonies as critical love ask us to resist isolation and individualism and instead commit to relational and collective work that is ongoing, imperfect, and deeply

human. Such work requires us to sit with discomfort, to ask difficult questions, and to attend carefully to how global conflicts, historical harms, and systemic inequities surface in our classrooms and in the lives of our students. We invite readers to engage with this special issue as both scholarship and a call to reflection and action. In doing so, we offer these questions for introspection:

- ◆ What might it mean to practice harmony as an ethical stance in our teaching, research, leadership, and everyday interactions?
- ◆ How might critical love guide us in reimagining English language education as a space for healing, solidarity, and shared humanity?

The contributions in this collection do not offer final answers. Rather, they extend invitations for further exploration. We hope these conversations continue to unfold across contexts, disciplines, and communities as part of a shared commitment toward more just, compassionate, and connected educational futures.

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Introduction

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Introduction

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