

Naming, sustaining, nurturing: Tensions, resistances and possibilities of Education, Antiracism and Decoloniality

Nomear, sustentar, nutrir: Tensões, resistências e possibilidades
da Educação, Antirracismo e Decolonialidade

Nommer, soutenir, nourrir: Tensions, résistances et possibilités
de l'éducation, de l'antiracisme et de la décolonialité

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Editorial

In the spring of 2024, we issued a call for a thematic number titled “Education, antiracism and decoloniality: tensions, resistances, and possibilities” as part of *Educação, Sociedade & Culturas* [Education, Society & Cultures], a multilingual journal of CIIE – Centre for Research and Intervention in Education of the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto, Portugal, as a result of an open call for special issues promoted by the Journal. At the time, the call for contributions stated that, in the face of particularly vicious contemporary colonial and racist violence, it is vital to call upon all antiracist and decolonial powers to understand current struggles and envision transformed futures. Keeping engaged in critical reflections about antiracist and decolonial struggles seems more necessary than ever as contexts become more urgent and demanding, and we witness a growing – and increasingly more explicit – backlash against diversity, antiracism and decoloniality.

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As scholars and academics, we recognise that we work, educate and research in contexts that remain deeply colonially entrenched. We seek to navigate these contexts and make sense of our own positionalities and work to foster antiracist and decolonial education and scholarship when these debates seem to be still in their infancy and stuck in the middle of colonial and racial continuities. We recognise that our desires for transformative antiracist and decolonial education are situated in a messy ‘middle’ of diverse concepts and realities within which we are seeking to think critically, surface different perspectives and make a difference in how these topics are conventionally addressed (Khoo & Vered 2020).

Taking different trajectories across countries, regions, and players, antiracist and decolonial approaches have gathered significant attention worldwide. Education has played a central role within these approaches, often with an instrumental or even servile rather than a transformative role. The project of decolonising education strives to counter racial discrimination by reforming national histories and curricula to render them more inclusive. However, these efforts have not (yet) been properly prioritised and systematically funded. On the contrary, constructive and progressive initiatives, such as foreign language and cultural programmes and supplementary schooling initiatives, have tended to suffer from disinvestment and neglect. Similarly, Indigenous, non-eurocentric and/or otherwise marginalised perspectives and scholarship on education have been largely ignored, raising important questions about who is supposed to benefit from the reform of national curricula and pedagogical practices and why.

The Special Issue invited contributions from scholars, educators, activists, and collectives striving to bring antiracist and decolonial futures of education and considered an array of topics, inter alia: disruptions, silences, resistances, effects in antiracist and decolonial educational praxis and policies, both considering non-formal, informal, and formal education; comprehensive, comparative, transdisciplinary, “border” perspectives and country-case analysis (especially from non-dominant perspectives) across education systems and key players, namely, non-traditional education actors and movements; race and (anti)racism manifestations in everyday life in the scope of “global” education endeavours (e.g., migration and education, international education, global citizenship education); or reparations in/and/through education, its relation and contribution to antiracist and decolonial education efforts. Mindful of the decolonial emphasis on pluralising and diversifying contributions, the Issue aimed to be multilingual, accepting contributions in ES&C’s publication languages – English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish.

This Special Issue brings a focus on the current convergence between heightened interest in antiracism and decolonisation within education while at the same time reflecting some of its core tensions, such as the performative adherence, capture and commodification or the lack of adequate and sustained support. Although originally issued as a multilingual call, most of the works on the current issue are written in English. About half of them feature European dominant contexts, where most authors have their institutional affiliation – particularly, the UK and Nordic countries – with the remaining four being contributions from and regarding Mexico, China, Brazil, and France. However, as the articles demonstrate, if the authors’ positionality is considered, a different picture unfolds, one that highlights the just tribute that needs to be paid to Southern scholars, including independent ones, contributing to this collection. Diversity does not

only mean geographical diversity, and the Global South is not the same as the geographical South, but instead reflects a range of less dominant knowledges and positionalities.

As editors, we are immensely grateful for such an inspiring collection of contributions. While assembling this number, it was often the case that we gathered inspiration from the authors' works and saw how they could positively impact others. Struggling to piece together and integrate this collection, we were ourselves confronted with many of the daily tensions in the debates around promoting decolonial/sing and antiracist education: whose voices are being amplified or concealed, according to what underlying reasoning, for what purpose, with which implications? Would methodology be an insightful organiser? Would "moving the margins to the centre" work – and if so, would it not reiterate assumed hierarchies and divisions and ultimately be purely performative? There is no easy balance, perhaps because balance assumes a certain stability, an equitable distribution of force, a more or less concrete direction to go and strive for, none of which exists when discussing decolonial/sing and antiracist efforts. These very questionings and pitfalls that we experienced in the effort of inviting readers to the texts that authors so thoughtfully shared in this collection are often at the table in the daily lives of scholars, educators, and individuals.

Ultimately, we agreed that, despite the diversity and uniqueness, the ten texts under this Special Issue provide concrete *possibilities* for furthering what decolonial/sed and antiracist education practices and scholarships *can* look like while keeping an engaged debate of its tensions and resistances. Moreover, articles in this collection do not conflate decolonisation with antiracism, nor do they try to subsume one under another. Instead, they shed light on the indispensable connection between both. In the face of blooming literature over the past decade, particularly on the topic of decolonising higher education (Arday & Mirza, 2018; Hayes et al., 2021; Shahjahan et al., 2021), efforts that critically focus on generative possibilities, that demonstrate the indispensability of addressing racism within decolonial/sing efforts, with both theoretical and methodological anchorage, as well as "political rigour" (Temper et al., 2019), might be of great value to those trying to make sense of what transformed (education) futures could look like.

Ioana Țișteea, in "Centring Roma perspectives and critically interrogating Eastern European whiteness: Entry points toward decolonising Nordic education and knowledge production", offers a "perspective of a non-Roma Eastern European (EE) researcher, to discuss possibilities to construct EE-BPoC solidarities towards decolonising Nordic education and knowledge production" (Țișteea, 2025). The work addresses the case of Roma in Nordic contexts from a non-dominant European perspective, intersecting readings from "the other Europe", migration, race, and racism to discuss decolonising education and knowledge.

Saffron East, in "The 'post-decolonial' moment? Radical pedagogies in UK Higher Education in historical perspective", maps antiracist pedagogies in the UK, with a focus on higher education, since the 1960s. Based on case studies analysing antiracist pedagogical approaches, the author argues for the need to reconnect to the "longer history of antiracist pedagogy (...) for continuing antiracist pedagogical work today" (East, 2025) in UK higher education. East provocatively criticises the decolonial moment in UK HE and proposes a 'post-decolonial' turn. Contributing an important account of Black and popular education, especially

focusing on the foundational contributions of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and the Open University. The neo-liberalization of HE points to the importance of this history, considering the increased challenges to antiracist education and entire critical programmes of study, especially in the UK but also across many continuing neo-liberal and increasingly neo-conservative contexts.

Alexander Black, Yesenia Bautista Ortiz, and César Eduardo Jiménez Pérez present “Pedagogy of the Assessed: Theatre of the Oppressed as participatory research method to interrogate the impact of assessment in the intercultural classroom”, an article made available in English, Spanish and Portuguese, based on participatory action-research, critical ethnography, and arts-based methods. The work presented is grounded in a collaboration between student and teacher researchers, who disrupt the coloniality of teaching and assessing globally dominant English as a Foreign Language, using critically creative practices of black-out poetry, image theatre and forum theatre. The authors use the topic of language assessment to illustrate “student experiences of coloniality and racism” in Mexico (Black et al., 2025), offering a vivid pedagogical experience and research account.

Cynthia Agra de Brito Neves, in “*Slam e educação: Gênero, raça e decolonialidade nas performances poéticas de estudantes brasileiros e franceses [Slam and education: gender, race and decoloniality in the poetic performances of Brazilian and French students]*”, focuses on the critical potential of slam, adding to the scholarship about non-formal decolonial and antiracist education possibilities. The author offers a cross-contextual reading of two slam school collectives from Brazil and France, furthering “how student-*slammers* from São Paulo/Brazil and Paris/France use poetic language to echo youth culture, performing poems that denounce the gender and racial violence to which they are historically subjected” (Neves, 2025).

Gustavo Belisário and Tanu Biswas, in “*‘Saber brincar’: A childist decolonial approach to play*”, discuss the importance of placing the debate on childism in decolonial thinking. On a reflection addressing informal, communal education, authors depart from an ethnographic experience in the Landless Workers Movement (MST) to explore the contours of play and the importance of play-as-‘brincar’ “in connecting children with their parents, grandparents, and the surrounding world (...) without disrupting the conviviality between adults and children” where play is viewed “as a foundation for intergenerational relationships based on links, connections, and care, shaping adults into good ancestors by *learning from* children and childhood” (Belisário & Biswas, 2025, italics as original).

Heidi Layne, Marika Oikarinen, Jaana Pesonen, Kara Ronai, and Elina Lehtomäki, in “Antiracism education in Finnish teacher education: A study of student teachers’ perceptions”, address the issue of racism and antiracism in the scope of teacher education programmes in four Finish universities. Discussing racialisation and whiteness as systemic, the authors present findings from a student survey that suggests that “student teachers recognise the existence of racism but can only largely observe it as outsiders who may not recognise the majority (white) privilege and the structural racism that exists in education” and reflect on the implications of “the gap between teacher education and the reality in schools” (Layne et al., 2025).

Penny Rabiger, in “Jumping and pushing through the cruel optimism of racial justice work in schools”, offers additional perspectives regarding teacher training and antiracism in schools. The author presents

findings from in-depth interviews, participant reflections and a focus group conducted with teachers and school leaders participating in a two-year Programme on Anti-Racist School, discussing knowledge, beliefs, motivations and conditions to engage in anti-racist work, “suggesting ways to jump and push through the cruel optimism of racial justice work (Meer, 2022) while maintaining a commitment to developing an anti-racist lens through which to operate” (Rabiger, 2025).

Zihuan Zhang, in “Anti-Black racism in China: A decolonial investigation of racial hierarchy and resistance with Black English teachers”, brings another angle of (anti)racism and teaching, addressing the scarcely known experiences of Black English instructors in Chinese English language teaching (ELT). Based on findings of in-depth interviews with Black teachers, the author discusses how racial hierarchies operate at the interplay of western temporal, cultural and racial logics to produce their expertise as less valuable and argues for “pluralising racial representations as an anti-racist education for Chinese students” and an education route to resist against racism (Zhang, 2025).

Fezile Joy Sibanda, in “They keep putting me on the race things: Raceification of Black Brit-ish academics within the EDI industrial complex”, focuses on Black experiences within the problematic contours of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Through Ubuntu-inspired storytelling and auto-ethnographic methodologies, the author analyses the experiences of Black Brit-ish academics working at university in England, presenting “raceification as a process in which Black academics are produced and reproduced as perpetual race experts within HE (...) a colonial gaze and hegemonic whiteness, shaping how Black academics and their knowledges are seen” (Sibanda, 2025).

Bhargabi Das and Ana Ivasiuc, in “CARE: Caring, anti-racist education and decolonial pedagogies in the neoliberal university and a colonial-born discipline”, discuss alternative pedagogies and relationalities within and despite disciplinary and structural boundaries. Based on an autoethnography research conducted in the scope of Anthropology teaching, the authors “underline the tensions and possibilities of anti-racist and decolonial pedagogies centred on care as they develop precariously within the neoliberal academy and from within a discipline born in the colonial encounter”. The authors provide an account of how these multiple layers impacted and determined alternative curriculum design, reading and assignment choices focused on a perspective of care.

Closing remarks

As we close this editorial, a brief remark on the past two years leading to the publication of this collection and how, on occasion, processes and contents align. The focus on learning with the authors’ work, pluralising the perspectives and adopting the imperatives of criticality, including ambivalence and self-critique, creativity and care, were vital along the way. Collaboration with authors, among the editors and with the ES&C team has been a convivial and mutually supportive exercise that has practically demonstrated how inviting and editing an academic journal special issue – a most academic of tasks – can be done a little differently, with a spirit of openness, rigour and care.

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Dr. Dalila Pinto Coelho is a researcher at the University of Porto and a full member of the Centre of Research and Intervention in Education (CIIE) of the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences (FPCEUP). With a background in Educational Sciences, her current work addresses Higher Education's role in antiracist, global and decolonial education. She integrated the COST Action DecoIDEV, furthering education's role in decolonising development. Current main funded research includes the projects *LE-DHEI– Landscapes and Eduscapes of Decolonising Higher Education: a European reading* (2024-2030), *DE-HED - Decolonising Higher Education and envisioning the Education dimension: towards a comprehensive view* (2023-2025) and *LED-EAR – Development Education and Antiracism Lab: possibilities, challenges, and effects* (2024-2025). She is a member of BAICE and ANGEL, and of the communities of practice Sinergias (bridging academia and civil society) and PCEP – Participation, communities and political education. She is a member of the editorial board of the international, multilingual Journal Sinergias – Diálogos educativos para a

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