"And then the English will come"
Envisioning a *Critical Multilingual Education* for the ELT classroom

"Y entonces vendrá el inglés"
Imaginando una educación multilingüe crítica para el aula de ELT

Eleni Louloudi
Bielefeld University
eleni.louloudi@uni-bielefeld.de

ABSTRACT
Critical literacies describe the need to understand language education as naturally grounded in deconstruction of social injustice and, ultimately, also as an educational space where social transformation finds its place. This (radically) deconstructive perspective inherently entails seeing language education as a multilingual setting, where language hierarchies are dismantled and translanguaging opportunities are embraced. For the ELT classroom, this also means seeing the colonial truths of the English language as indispensable to its instruction.

Although the intersection of critical literacies and multilingual education is fundamental for a critical lens to be adopted in ELT, there is little research that foregrounds their connection. Consequently, this article explores theoretical and practice-oriented intersections of critical literacies and translanguaging from an ELT perspective, drawing from ethnographic insights collected in NYC. Emphasis is given in the development of a framework of a Critical Multilingual Education, detailing on how this can inform school practice and help embrace emergent multilinguals.

Keywords: critical multilingual education, translanguaging, critical literacies, ELT, language education

RESUMEN
Las alfabetizaciones críticas describen la necesidad de entender la educación lingüística como algo naturalmente basado en la deconstrucción de la injusticia social y, en última instancia, también como un espacio educativo donde la transformación social encuentra su lugar. Esta perspectiva (radicalmente) deconstructiva implica intrínsecamente considerar la enseñanza de idiomas como un entorno multilingüe en el que se desmantelan las jerarquías lingüísticas y se aprovechan las oportunidades de aprendizaje de otros idiomas. Para el aula de ELT, esto también significa ver las verdades coloniales de la lengua inglesa como indispensables para su enseñanza.

Aunque la intersección de las alfabetizaciones críticas y la educación multilingüe es fundamental para adoptar una perspectiva crítica en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, existen pocas investigaciones que destaquen su conexión. En consecuencia, este

artículo explora las intersecciones teóricas y prácticas de las alfabetizaciones críticas y el translenguaje desde la perspectiva de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, a partir de datos etnográficos recogidos en Nueva York. Se hace hincapié en el desarrollo de un marco de Educación Multilingüe Crítica, detallando cómo éste puede informar la práctica escolar y ayudar a acoger a los multilingües emergentes.

Palabras clave: educación multilingüe crítica, translenguaje, alfabetización crítica, ELT, enseñanza de idiomas

1. INTRODUCTION

Language education has long been moving from a field of language acquisition to an educational environment that aims to understand language(s) holistically and educate both teachers and students about the opportunities to understand language as inherently connected to power and privilege as well as biases and oppression. This – more theorized and less practiced – shift has certainly not come without several resistances: from book banning, to prohibiting languages in school yards, to even denying students communication (cf. Panagiotopoulou & Knappik, 2023).

Even in these challenging times, the field of critical education has been progressing and more publications in various contexts (see Gerlach, 2020; Pandya et al., 2022; Selvi & Kocaman, 2024) underline the importance of criticality in the whole continuum of education: from kindergarten to university and beyond. One of the concepts that has specifically addressed criticality as a stance for language education is that of critical literacy (Luke, 2014; Yoon, 2016). As Janks argues, even "in a peaceful world without the threat of global warming or conflict or war, where everyone has access to education, health care, food and a dignified life" (2014, p. 32) there would still be a need for critical literacy, – even more so, in a world that injustice is still daily business.

Even though critical literacies aim at the identification, analysis, and ultimate transformation of all injustices, with an intersectional view towards privilege and oppression, there is still little research that connects them to the necessary "translanguaging turn" (García & Li, 2014): criticality cannot take form in education if monolingual norms are still in position in classrooms around the world. Targeting this need for linking these two –naturally interconnected– directions, this article will focus on foregrounding a *critical multilingual education*, while detailing on the *whats* and *hows* necessary for its application.

To do so, it will employ ethnographic insights collected in public schools in New York City (NYC), which already work with forms of a critical multilingual perspective. Because of the little research existing, the collection and analysis of such insights is indispensable to the progression of the field. Finally, it will also make some implications on a potential transfer to other educational contexts and, in particular, this of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Germany[1].

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Defining "critical" and "multilingual"

Before taking upon the task to propose a framework of elements for a critical multilingual education, it is necessary to first look into these concepts (*critical* and *multilingual*) separately, not only because they have long been studied independently in the academic discourse, but also so that their natural connection becomes apparent.

Already the intent to assign one definition to the Critical is a paradox: criticality is one of these concepts that have been used widely to mean different things, mainly because it is subject to situated knowledge (Louloudi, 2023). Even though sometimes vague, or even too specific (see Pandya et al., 2022), it seems to take certain directions that are not necessarily equivalent not yet antithetical. One of these, usually the most prominent among scholars from the Anglosphere, refers to critical as questioning and analysis of power, drawing from e.g. Freire, Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno (cf. Vasquez, 2017). This definition is then connected to education in that it envisions all educational settings to be places where sociopolitical deconstruction finds its place, biases and privileges are identified and students and teachers work together towards societal transformation.

Another direction, usually still prominent in European settings, sees criticality as high-order thinking and questioning (Luke, 2014), however not automatically and inevitably connected neither to power relations nor to society critique and change. This direction usually also sees criticality as a project of self-growth and self-voicing, focusing on giving students the tools to rather transform their own lives and less society (Louloudi, 2023).

This contribution sees a critical (multilingual) perspective as grounded in questions of power and societal transformation, adopting a rather radical lens. However, this perspective should in no way indicate that such approaches do not in fact also aim at individual growth. Nevertheless, the final goal of a critical education remains with taking action towards collective justice (Luke, 2014; Louloudi, 2023).

In that sense, criticality becomes not only a question of what we teach in the classroom (i.e. the sociopolitical topics and themes, such as racism, sexism, etc.) but also a question of how we do so: the methodological steps we take to introduce, question, and dismantle the problematic behind these topics. A pedagogical concept that addresses criticality in this multifaceted way is this of critical literacy. As Luke has argued, critical literacy describes "the use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyse, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of institutions and everyday life" (2014, p. 21). This popular definition not only ascribes a sociopolitical direction to critical literacy, but also already indicates its holistic educational character: a critical deconstruction cannot (and should not) happen randomly and irregularly, but within a (classroom) system of collective, stable change.

A holistic deconstruction is also connected to the rather new roles that both teachers and students are called to take upon: it is not about the teacher instructing criticality, in one given, knowledge-oriented way, but it is more about the teacher infusing criticality (Chang-Bacon et al., 2022), taking a step back and becoming a learner themselves (Louloudi & Schildhauer, forthcoming). This way, a critical perspective can be applied within a non-critical system; even though critical literacies will indeed work best within a systemic and systematic embracement of society critique, this absoluteness of an "all or

nothing" approach might scare teachers away, making criticality unsustainable for the people who are the primary operators in its application it (see Louloudi & Panagiotopoulou, i.p.).

All these elements of criticality are by some manner also linked to the way multilingualism is defined. Multilingualism is also a term that has been widely used to mean different things at times, evolved over the years and has been discussed as connected to a variety of other concepts that are employed to describe the use of language(s) in and out of educational settings. In language education, multilingualism is usually linked to what Conteh and Meier (2014) have described as a multilingual turn, which usually refers to the disruption of monolingual ideologies, recognizing at the same time that teaching of languages is an active process of becoming a multilingual (García & Kleyn, 2016). Under this turn, a variety of other concepts, closely related to multilingualism, have flourished, with the most prominent being bilingualism (García, 2009), plurilingualism and metrolingualism (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010), surpassing other popular (linguistic) terms such as code-switching, because they understand language learning in a more holistic way. Interpretations of these concepts, however, have focused on languaging as an additive process: from one language to two (bilingual), or to many (multi/ plurilingual), emphasizing this way the system of one named language that can be added to another. Even though scholars in the field (García & Li, 2014, Lau & Van Viegen, 2020, Lin et al., 2020 etc.) further use the concepts in a critical, rather dynamic way, they are still oftentimes used to mean the conjunction of *n* autonomous languages.

One of the concepts that aimed to deconstruct the notion of one given named language is this of translanguaging (García & Li, 2014). Translanguaging "refers to the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire, which does not in any way correspond to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages" (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 14). This definition already indicates the fundamental difference in perspective that translanguaging poses in comparison to other terms: it aims to dismantle societal norms and, in that, also reconstruct other, more inclusive ones. This is what positions translanguaging within critical educational theory: its open quest for social justice in the classroom (see García et al., 2017).

2.2 Reconstructing the critical and the multilingual connection for English Language Teaching

As mentioned before, the elemental connection of critical and multilingual education lies in their goal to dismantle problematic, normative structures and help students and teachers take action towards social justice in and out of the classroom. This connection is rather natural and apparent; however, for them to coexist and work simultaneously in the language classroom, their link needs to become intentional and be practiced as such: the critical cannot be critical without the multilingual and the multilingual does not have the same effect without being intentionally critical.

In more detail, critical education cannot really be critical without considering the language hierarchies that uphold and perpetuate biases through and about languaging. Specifically for ELT, this starts with what Seltzer and de los Ríos have noted as "put[ing] English itself in quotation marks" (2018, p. 50), or in other words, questioning not only the purposes of ELT but the very foundation of the English language. Such questions

include (but are not limited to): which English, whose English, why English, or English by whom? All these questions do not only apply in environments where ELT is taught as the (main) language of the system (e.g. in the US, in Canada, or in Australia), but expressly apply to settings where English is taught as an additional (sometimes *still* foreign) language (e.g. in Germany or in Finland).

There are indeed specific particularities that arise when considering a critical multilingual lens for the English instruction, because of the explicit status of the English language as a global language (Galloway & Rose, 2015), a world language (Kachru, 1992), or a Lingua Franca (Jenkins, 2006). In their chapter, Tian et al. (2020) present three main arguments that finely summarize the special case of English when considered from a (critical) translanguaging perspective: 1) going from monolithic English to the act of English-*ing*, by shifting the focus from the acquisition of a named language to how people use it in "in real-life communicative contexts" (ibid.), which not only includes the different linguistic forms that arise, but also the social values, attitudes and beliefs expressed when practicing languaging; 2) this is directly connected to dismantling the myth of the native speaker: one of the arguments that has been long deconstructed in theory (see from Coulmas, 1981 to Macedo, 2019 and Pennycook, 2021), yet still creeps into policies, curricula and classroom practices, specifically in additional language settings (see Davydova, 2020; Zehne, 2022). Deconstructing native speakerism does not only refer to shifting away from the native/non-native dichotomy, but requires making the realization of how an English-speaking world was even constructed in the first place part of our classroom practices (cf. García, 2019, p. 3) such questioning also demands that we understand that English cannot be taught – cognitively and metacognitively – in English-only settings that uphold these problematic, normative linguistic narratives: the teaching of English should perceive all learners as emergent multilinguals "who are aware of and sensitive to the context and could perform fluid, dynamic, and complex language practices with creativity and criticality to achieve their expressive and communicative needs" (Tian et al., 2020, p. 10).

All these three elements position critical multilingual education within decolonial action: the teaching of English cannot be separated from the language's history and current status, while also embracing the opportunity to be used as "a third space" (Bhabha, 1996) that embraces linguistic and sociopolitical ambiguities. In other words, this would require students understanding "how language is used and, importantly, how language can be used against them" (Alim, 2005, p. 28).

In ELT, there are already concepts that point to the interconnection of critical literacies and multilingual practices, as defined above. Seltzer and de los Ríos (2018, p. 50) propose a critical translingual approach that concentrates on questioning English as a "teachable subject", while moving to centering students' linguistic diversity in the classroom, drawing from critical sociolinguistics and raciolinguistics (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This shift necessitates seeing students as racialized speakers and calls teachers to question their own privileges and biases in regard to the ways they understand languaging.

Lau's (2020) study on the intersections of translanguaging and critical bi-literacies points to similar directions. When referring to translanguaging, Lau speaks of a "resemiotization of critical learning" (2020, p. 117), not only because it helps reground the specific sociolinguistic context in which critical learning takes place, but also because

no deconstruction of power can occur without perceiving the very language(s) we speak as the mediator of this deconstruction; as she argues, "language is a mediator, rather than a mere conveyor, of thoughts through which we form, transform, create, remember, talk and write about our thoughts and ideas" (2020, p. 118). In other words, this would mean, for example, that critical literacies cannot lead to society critique if practiced within English-only environments, which reinforce the dominant linguistic ideologies in place.

Chang-Bacon et al. (2022) also expand on the role of translanguaging in critical literacies and vice versa. Drawing from fundamental characteristics of critical learning, i.e. the right of students to learn in environments that reflect their realities, they mention that accordingly, critical literacies should help create holistic settings that center the experiences of multilingual students, specifically with respect to discrimination, "involving nationalism, racism, and other forms of intolerance" (2022, p. 44). In that, they (as well as Seltzer & de los Ríos, 2018 and Lau, 2020) emphasize the role of the teacher as one of the most important figures in adopting and applying such a perspective.

3. METHODOLOGY

To better understand how a critical multilingual perspective can work in the classroom, a deeper exploration of settings that already work within the principles of critical theory is needed. Because criticality is rarely a straightforward goal of educational policies around the world (see Louloudi, 2023), it is rather the teachers' choice and personal engagement that makes these practices visible (König & Louloudi, forthcoming). As Chang-Bacon et al. also argue, "it is most often teachers who create space for critical engagement in their classrooms" (2022, p. 45). Even though the study of such classrooms is of uttermost importance for the progression of the field, the access to these environments is very difficult, not only because of practical issues (e.g. interest of the teacher), but also because it can lead to very normative conclusions of the researcher (i.e. is this successful, is this right or wrong), if the situatedness of critical learning is not taken into consideration (cf. Pennycook, 2021). However, across the globe, there do exist specific schools whose work is dedicated to (interpretations of) critical learning already through their school policies and curricula, usually referred to as inclusive, international, or multilingual schools. The study of these schools can prove to be very fruitful not only as a means of good practice but also because the setting of the school is usually more accessible.

This is the frame of this study project as well: the investigation and understanding of settings that already work within some fabric of critical learning. Because of the central point of the study being on a holistic conception of the social phenomena that construct criticality, a focused ethnography was selected as the method to look into the "actions, interactions and social situations" (Knoblauch, 2005, online) related to the ways selected inclusive or multilingual schools in New York City understand and interpret critical multilingualism. More specifically, emphasis was put on approaching the field with "an ethnographic sensibility" to help "remain open to the idea that [the] object of study is not just a 'case' to examine in relation to theories we hold independently, but something that tells us more than we knew to ask" (Longo & Zacka, 2019, p. 1067).

This ultimately meant that focused ethnography was approached as a frame of mind (Corbett, 2022) to help investigate critical multilingualism in the specific (international, national, local and communal) context of every school (cf. Blommaert, 2013). In particular, the study is based on short-term visits to three *public* schools (from primary to high school level), during which field observations were done as well as in-situ conversations with the teachers and collection of artifacts (materials, photographs, student work). All selected schools follow, by curriculum, a multilingual pedagogy, with focus on translanguaging (after García 2009), which is further connected to a culturally responsive pedagogy.

More specifically, three NYC public schools with multilingual settings were visited and the field was explored on the basis of four in-situ conversations with teachers and principals, five classroom observations, collection of ethnographic artifacts (e.g. school materials or students' products) and an ethnographic researcher's journal. The in-situ conversations were 1,5-hour gatherings with multiple stakeholders within the respective school: principals, head teachers, curriculum managers and counselors. They were all in multiple stages in their educational paths: from early career to final stages. These groups usually consisted of five to eight facilitators and took place both before and after the observations. For clarity, in the results section, they will be referred to as *teachers*, even though each has several educational roles in their respective school.

The classroom observations varied from 15 minutes to one hour. Emphasis was put in observing multiple educational levels: from early primary school classes to high school, to specifically target the *continuum* of possible critical perspectives. Access was provided by a key person to the field, who arranged for our research team to see everyday practice.

The ethnographic insights collected were then analysed in line with a Grounded Theory lens (after Charmaz, 2014). In particular, in an initial coding phase, first directions and connections regarding criticality were identified. In the focused coding phase, these formed more central categories, which will be presented in the following sequence. These will focus not only on *what* a critical multilingual perspective is as observed in the different environments (see Louloudi & Panagiotopoulou, i. p.), but rather on the prerequisites – the *hows*, the vital requirements needed for such a perspective to flourish, as described by the teachers and seen in their practices.

4. RESULTS - GROUNDING A CRITICAL MULTILINGUAL FRAMEWORK OF PRACTICE – THE *WHATS* AND *HOWS* FROM THE FIELD

4.1 Seeing *Critical* and *multilingual* as naturally connected

When addressing the intersections of critical and multilingual learning, teachers positioned themselves very clearly: "breaking societal norms starts with breaking linguistic ones" (in-situ conversation with teachers, public primary school in NYC). Already from this short quote, the teacher here describes the foundation of a critical multilingual perspective: one cannot identify, address, and deconstruct societal norms, if linguistic ones are still held in place. This already makes the multilingual a prerequisite of the critical: other sociopolitical power relations will not be dismantled in classrooms

where linguistic barriers still exist. This reflects fundamental understandings of translanguaging as a pedagogy that invites a critical stance holistically (cf. Tian & King, 2023) and not in bits and pieces: this requires teachers, as described in the quote above, to see language – and literacy – as grounded in power dynamics (Fairclough, 2001; Janks, 2010) and, consequently, also multilingual education as "tied to the political power of the state or to the people who speak the different languages" (García & Lin, 2016, p. 5).

When asked to elaborate on this, the teacher continued: "Translanguaging helps us give space to the students to be their whole selves in the classroom. If this is given, then the English will come". This lens already takes a step forward: it is not about starting with the linguistic norms, but it is also about starting with the *speakers* themselves, while centering their holistic self in the classroom. The same position is expressed by de los Ríos and Seltzer (2017), who explain that starting with speakers means seeing the "creative and critical enactment of [students'] holistic repertoire" (2017, p. 57) and not separating between/among the languages as first/second, or additional/native. The teacher here also adds the dimension of acquiring English as an additional language being secondary, but not necessarily of secondary importance; "the English will come" in this case means that only when the students feel holistically represented in the classroom, the cognitive acquisition of the language will follow. Here, again, the starting point is different: the end goal is still "the coming of English", but it does require students to be represented *first*. This positions translanguaging at the core of critical learning: understanding, questioning, and working towards representation of all students, specifically the minoritized (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Lau et al., 2022). Such practices require teachers to have a clear position towards their teaching, a critical multilingual *stance*, and not see criticality as a quick fix, a single learning incident, i.e. as a simple scaffolding technique (Vasquez, 2004).

4.2. Focusing on the *Sociopolitical*

When addressing their lessons as connected to criticality, teachers often talked about centering a social justice perspective. This was either addressed methodologically, for example, by creating student-centered settings, or it was considered from a content-related point of view, i.e. by tackling social justice topics, such as race, gender, and class. With regard to the latter, teaches criticized (the system) themselves, arguing that this is also rather new to them, and they did not "address it five years ago". Even though a 'new thing', their lens was quite clear: sociopolitical topics should reflect the biographies of the children in the classroom, which is an elemental characteristic of critical learning (Lewison et al., 2002; Yoon, 2015; García et al., 2017). Considering that all schools observed have a focus on welcoming students with an immigration background, the emphasis of centering biographies should also reflect these experiences of immigration.

Having said that, social justice for the teachers meant having materials that reflect the real-life stories of their students in an authentic way: authenticity in this case was translated to having linguistically diverse books (e.g. in Spanish or in Chinese), but also a great variety of topics, such as stories about border-crossing, or immigration stories in general, stories about women as leaders, body diversity, Black Lives Matter, segregation, religion, class and climate – mostly represented by picturebooks in the lower grades and

by novels in the upper grades. This was also to be seen through the observations: these materials were not only very prominently presented in the classrooms, but the classrooms themselves were vehicles of social justice topics. The two pictures below, from two different schools, negotiate this link: social justice as a topic (racism, linguistic representation), but also *through* translanguaging:

Figure 1. Students' products

These two pictures illustrate this connection between critical learning and translanguaging: the one seems to be a prerequisite of the other: one cannot critically discuss matters such as racism without being allowed to do so in their holistic linguistic repertoire, while translanguaging can only work when thought and practiced as a pedagogy "for minoritized students to navigate the 'codes of power'" (Lau et al., 2022, p. 383) and not as a random incident (see also Seltzer, 2023).

4.3. Understanding criticality as bound to the community

Part of understanding and embracing students' biographies, is the involvement and fostering of the local communities to which students belong. This point was made by the teachers, but not as a one-way street: not only is the school classroom supposed to reflect the particular sociocultural matters of the local community, but, for critical learning to be made possible, the school itself should "take care of the community too" (in-situ conversation with teachers, public primary school in NYC). Taking care of the community meant for the teachers (and in particular the principal) that they make sure that, first and foremost, the basic needs of the students are being met: if the basics are not covered, the possibilities to engage in any type of critical learning are very low. Next to that, *caring* also meant understanding the community as "a classroom every day" (Aitken & Robinson, 2020, p. 78). In that, teachers talked about parents being members of study groups and actively involved in their children's learning. Parental and community involvement is an essential part of both critical literacy and translanguaging pedagogies. This negotiates criticality as a continuum practice, where not only teachers, but all community members are "mediators of language and culture, and agents of change and education reform" (Van Viegen & Lau, 2020, p. 327). However, the focus does not only lie with community matters being reflecting in everyday learning, but also with the necessity of school nurturing the well-being of the families, so that the students can

indeed receive the best chance to understand, analyse and then transform their own communities. As Tupas and Martin argue, the most successful ways to engage in a (critical) multilingual perspective "have been those which empower local people to decide on the social development needs of their communities" (2017, p. 256).

4.4   Developing a critical multilingual stance through teacher collaboration

To be able to take into consideration all the above-mentioned points, teachers talked about the importance of a clear strategy for the school: a critical multilingual lens can only function as a stance towards education; practically, this requires a comprehensive whole-school approach, which is only possible through a constant teacher collaboration. During the visits, this point was one of the most obvious ones to observe: teachers sat together and exchanged ideas as part of their everyday life. As the principals told us later, teacher collaboration is "the main focus of the schools" (in-situ conversation with teachers, public primary school in NYC). In that, emphasis is given to the teachers' own identity and what they bring to the classroom, a point that is fundamental in any type of critical learning: this means not only disrupting traditional roles and allowing teachers to be vulnerable in the ways they express their own (language) identity together with their students (König & Louloudi, forthcoming), but also making sure that they "disrupt their own learning experiences, often in immersion classrooms where only the target language is said to be used" (García, 2023, p. xx). This critical disruption is only possible when teachers feel to be "a part of the bigger puzzle" (in-situ conversation with teachers, public primary school in NYC), and not as single fighters in this battle against injustice.

Having a strong collaboration among all members of the school allows for students to be taught in an environment of critical multilingual stability, where norms are continually deconstructed. This is even extended when the cooperation is furthered by university researchers. Shepard-Carey and Tian make a strong case for the importance of teacher-research collaboration in translanguaging pedagogies, arguing that it "may advance theory and practice and build classroom environments that sustain translanguaging pedagogies as everyday practice and embrace the linguistic realities of multilingual students" (2023, p. 3). This is mainly because such coexisting allows for a shared feeling of discomfort to take over and intensify the learning experience (Louloudi, 2023): teachers and researchers *juntos* learn to let go of the preconceptions of what criticality *should* look like and embrace the situatedness of the respective classroom.

4.5   Advocating for policy reform

Teaching towards the goals of social justice from a critical multilingual perspective can oftentimes be overwhelming for schools that still need to meet their annual goals and prepare the students for standardised tests. Within a system that only supports traditional forms of assessment and success is defined by grades, teaching social justice becomes an 'extra thing' that depends on the personal interests and additional involvement of all parties. As García puts it, "teachers are often constrained by school policies and curricula" (2023: p. xvii). This was one of the major points that the teachers we visited brought up as a requirement for adopting a critical multilingual perspective – as one of the principals put it "the important part is that teachers are not afraid" (in-situ

conversation with teachers, public primary school in NYC). For teachers not to be afraid, there needs to be a system that reinforces and preserves the goals of social justice. Even though studies show that teachers are indeed the primary actors in embracing critical multilingual practices (Rosiers et al., 2018; Louloudi, 2023), without advocating for a policy reform, we run the risk of putting such a demanding task to the shoulders of the individual teacher – and that, without even providing them with the proper education to do so. The ultimate goal of any critical endeavor should still be to "transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of institutions and everyday life" (Luke, 2014, p. 21) and with that, also the very policies that uphold unjust narratives and deny students their right to full communication, participation and representation.

4.6   Embracing hope and joy

While all of the above-mentioned elements of critical multilingual education rather focus on the disruption of well-established societal norms, and the discomfort that this struggle can cause to all parties involved, the teachers in this study focused on embracing criticality as a product of joy. This was expressed in various ways: in the conversations, where we were told that "for the learning to stick, kids need to have fun while breaking norms" (in-situ conversation with teachers, public primary school in NYC), but also in the overall environment of the schools that transformed important sociopolitical topics to creative projects through i.e. colorful posters or students' drawings (see Figure 2 and 3). The two images taken in two different schools are examples of this joyful creativity:

Figure 2. Students' products, Loving Earth

Figure 3. Students' signs on the classroom door

In both pictures, respect is the underlying topic of discussion – the one related to students having agency in their own classroom and the other one in seeing love as related to respecting the earth – both are translanguaging products (English, Spanish, Sign Language) that were created by the students and are displayed in the classroom. These two elements – love and agency – are the underlying link between joy and criticality: if students are not taught that there is joy at the end of the tunnel, "the learning won't stick" (in-situ conversation with teachers, public primary school in NYC). This negotiates the concept of radical hope (Heller & McElhinny, 2017), where joy is not employed to enforce "bland positivity and admiration for the way things are" (Pennycook, 2021, p. 4), but to underline that resistance is indeed resistance is as much "an action of struggle, as one of joy and healing" (Louloudi & Panagiotopoulou, i.p.).

5. DISCUSSION. AND NOW WHAT? DRAWING ON IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GERMAN CONTEXT

All these elements of a critical multilingual education as described before result from a situated, context-specific understanding of criticality that applies to the environments visited: three public schools in NYC with a great focus on these concepts. Even though situated and not directly to be applied to any other context as such (see Louloudi, 2023; Pennycook, 2021), one can certainly draw points for potential transfer. The following paragraphs will try to draw on the lessons learned for the German ELT context, keeping in mind the particularities of the system in which we operate.

This is already the first point to be made: the system. The system itself plays a very important role in the ways critical multilingual perspectives can find space and flourish; educational policy and (English) curricula in Germany do focus substantially in language skill acquisition and any form of a critical endeavour (e.g. in the English curriculum, see Matz, 2020), still target the final goal of acquiring English, seeing criticality as a short-term addition, or as some type of scaffolding (see Gerlach, 2020). For a critical multilingual perspective to be adopted, the system needs to shift the main focus of education –and not only ELT– to developing engaged, democratic citizens. For ELT, this would mean moving from the question *are they learning English* to questions such as *why are they learning English*, *whose English are they learning*, *how is this English contributing to a more just society, how are the students' (sociolinguistic) identities a part of this English*?

These questions already point to a direction that sees ELT not only as a *Lingua Franca* (Jenkins, 2006), but as a medium of deconstruction and decolonisation itself (Vaish, 2005), while also understanding its history as a language of colonisation (see Macedo, 2018). In that sense, English is indeed "a site of competing (and contradictory) ideologies" (Canagarajah, 2000, p. 130) that need to be honoured in the classroom in their entirety. To be able to do so in the German ELT, it is not enough to move away from colonial perspectives in our materials (e.g. the textbooks) or in our literary canon, but we need to disrupt monolingual ideologies (i.e. English-only policies) that keep these colonial truths in place. This means embracing a multilingual policy that is "tied to [the] local and regional struggles" (Luke, 2005, p. xv) of our students. Consequently, multilingualism for the German ELT context means embracing the holistic linguistic

repertoire that all speakers bring with them to the classroom, including their family languages (see Panagiotopoulou & Uçan, 2023).

Even though publications in the field (Schmid & Schmidt, 2017; Bonnet & Siemund, 2018) point to the direction of multilingualism as a necessity for the English classroom, there is still very little being done in the actual classrooms. This goes beyond the instruction of English, to all the other languages that are taught within the "foreign language" paradigm, i.e. also Spanish. García García and Reiman, for instance, argue that multilingualism cannot be thought as a 'networking goal' among the different subjects, but needs to address the needs of multilingual speakers (2020, p. 12). As they continue, this does not only refer to the students, but also to the multilingual teachers and their repertoire.

To be able to adopt such a holistic lens, and see change in the classroom, a critical multilingual perspective needs to be fostered from the very beginning of the school continuum. In that, teacher education plays an indispensable role; as Hsieh and Cridland-Hughes (2022) argue.

Using preservice teacher education to engage the question of access and denial of marginalized identities in the official curriculum, and of simultaneous welcoming and unwelcoming structures within a particular school context, is central to preparing teachers to make decisions in real classrooms that hold space for all. For our context, this means deconstructing the English-only policies university departments like to adopt and embracing our student teachers' linguistic repertoire from the beginning of their studies – however, not from a scaffolding point of view, but from a holistic critical perspective towards the education we offer: critical multilingual education means working towards the goals of social justice in and outside of the classroom.

6. CONCLUSION

This article tried to detail on the elements of a critical multilingual education both from a theoretical and an empirical perspective. In doing so, prominent academic work in the field (e.g. Setlzer & de los Ríos, 2018; García, 2020; Lau, 2020; Lau et al., 2022) was taken into consideration and combined with an empirical lens through insights collected in public NYC schools that already work with different forms of critical multilingual learning. The results describe that for such a lens to work, a holistic interconnection of critical and multilingual is necessary, which can find its place in the classroom in various ways: 1) by centering sociopolitical issues that reflect the students' biographies, while embracing students' holistic linguistic repertoire; 2) by identifying points of communication with the students' communities and including those into the everyday learning; 3) by supporting and intensifying teachers' collaboration, but at the same time, also advocating for a policy reform, when the system itself holds problematic structures (e.g. English-only instruction) into position and 4) by nurturing joy and (radical) hope.

All these elements can show good potential to be adopted and adapted in other educational contexts, such as the German ELT context, as long as the situated particularities of these are being taken into consideration. The main requirement for a systematic adoption of a critical multilingual perspective is to disrupt the normative structures that the system itself keeps in place. However, this is a long-term, rigorous

and exhaustive task that, if seen and treated as an all-or-nothing approach, will result in overwhelm, hopelessness and, consequently, little action.

Criticality can, and should, still be thought as a stance we can adopt step-by-step: one little disruption at a time, one better material, one move forward. The more we walk towards it, the easier it will get.

NOTAS / NOTES

1 Germany's ELT context is being discussed as my own field of action. It is important to note that in the German context, English is being taught as a "foreign" [sic] or additional language and is not directly comparable to contexts where English is the primary language of instruction or of the system. However, many implications can be drawn from these environments, as seen in this article. These implications are not only relevant to the German context, but also to other European settings that treat the instruction of English in a similar way, i.e. Finland.

2 Considering the abovementioned definitions, the term that best describes the endeavor of this project is this of a *critical translingual education*, and not multilingual: even though the focus in fact on translanguaging, I still feel the need to stay within the term of multilingual education, because it still better describes the field in which we operate. As García & Lin (2016) also argue: "by upholding the terms "bilingual" and "multilingual" despite our own heteroglossic theoretical lens, we recognize the very real and material effect of named languages on people".

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