

ESI IN ENGLISH

Multiplatform project

Created and managed

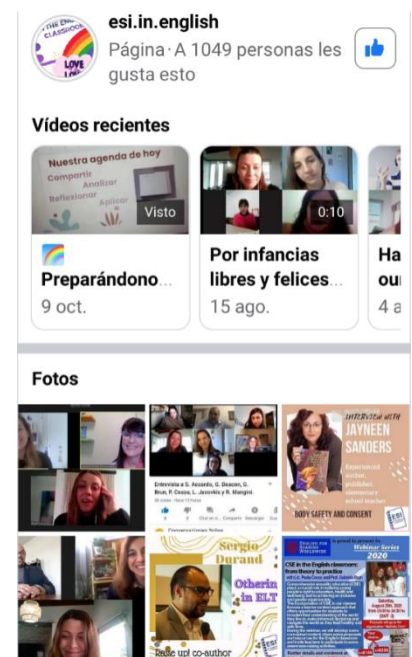
by Paola Cossu and Gabriela Brun

Lodged in Instagram, Facebook and YouTube: *esi.in.english*

Are you a teacher, a linguist and/or a researcher in the field? Have you ever thought of the importance of decolonising the syllabus? Do you enjoy being part of a community of practice? Can a Freirian perspective enrich English lessons? Do renowned speakers exert any influence on regular lessons at school? Is CSE part of our lessons? Some answers and new questions can be found in this project called *ESI in English*.

ESI in English is a multiplatform project envisioned and carried out by Paola Cossu and Gabriela Brun, EFL teachers, teacher educators and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) advocates from Junín, province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. They created the *esi.in.english* Instagram and Facebook accounts in the second half of 2019, when they started chairing workshops at different higher education institutions and lecturing at national conferences. The purpose sought with the opening of these virtual spaces was to promote social justice and CSE issues in the English language classroom at all the levels of the educational system. These accounts work as a repository of teaching resources and, above all, as a dynamic exploration of diverse voices that enter into dialogue to contribute to continuing professional development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and to enable the questioning of traditional practices that perpetuate uneven power relations and inequity both in the classroom and outside its walls. They invite, as Freire did, *teachers-students* and *students-teachers* to transform reality: “To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (2005 [1970]: 47). bell hooks (2006 [1994]) holds that it is by choosing love that “we are best positioned to transform society in ways that enhance the collective good”. These complementary views on education for freedom through love have given roots and inspiration to these channels of communication *from, to* and *with* the teaching community.

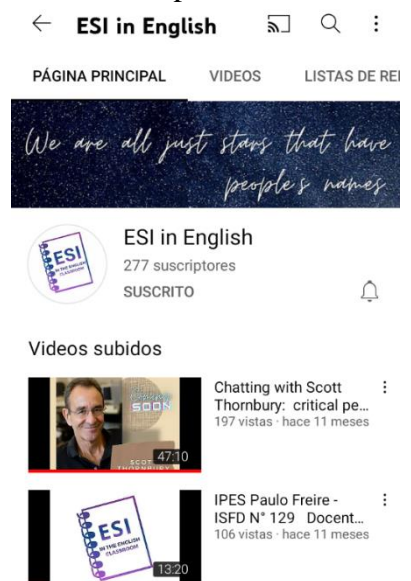
As Argentinian teachers of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary educational institutions and as teacher educators of ongoing professional development courses, Cossu and Brun truly believe in the urgent need for the decolonisation of the curriculum. Historically, content choice, material adoption and learning objectives in English Language Teaching have been established from a Eurocentric perspective to satisfy external interests, led by an idea of superiority in the target language and culture, being British English the favoured variety and ignoring *World Englishes*, concept introduced by Braj Kachru and deeply analysed by Suresh Canagarajah, and the inherent values of all languages and cultures. It has taken many years to dismantle those preconceptions and to realise that English could and should be taught to express our identity, to get to know about ourselves and others, to bridge distances in the encounter with those others and to collaborate in the solution of problems in a Human Rights framework. Then, decolonising the curriculum implies questioning the victors’ story, as Chimamanda Adichie warns us in her famous TED Talk: *The Danger of a Single Story*. And most importantly, not only do teachers have to question the information and the sources used for their lessons but also students must learn to question what they are being taught. B.



Kumaravadivelu, in *Language Teacher Education for a Global Society* (2012, p. 2-10), adds that the current teaching context, apart from being postnational due to globalisation, postmodern –beyond grand narratives–, and postcolonial, as discussed above, is immersed in post-transmission and post-method perspectives, since teachers no longer hold a passive technician role and are aware that no recipe can be applied in all circumstances. These authors help us see the necessity for reflective and active teachers and learners, capable of becoming agents of change, an objective pursued also by Cossu and Brun.

ESI in English witnessed significant growth. Along with the pandemic crisis, 2020 brought about the opportunity to contact minority groups' representatives, teacher trainers, materials developers, curriculum designers, researchers and linguists from every corner of the world, who, with immense humbleness, engaged in enriching recorded interviews uploaded to a YouTube channel opened for that purpose. Selected from a postcolonial perspective, foreign and local speakers from a plurality of scenarios, such as a university or a refugee camp, were summoned to converse in English or Spanish accordingly. Within the international sphere, Jayneen Sanders dealt with *Body safety and Consent in Children literature*, Ilá Coímbra, James Taylor and Katherine Bilsborough, discussed *Diversity in coursebooks*, Sergio Durand dwelt on *Othering in ELT*, Heloisa Duarte spoke about *Ageism*, Dr. Joshua Paiz and Dr. John Gray proposed *Queering the English language classroom*, Tyson Seburn agreed with them in the need for a *Critical Pedagogy* and for putting *Teacher Identity* on the spotlight, Marek Kiczowski criticised *Native speakerism in teacher hiring processes*, Scott Thornbury asked for space for *Learner's voice* in class, and Linda Ruas stressed the necessity to address *Global issues* with our students. Within the national sphere, Karina Saturno delved into *Trans childhood* by opening her heart as a mother of a trans boy from Junín, Dr. Darío Banegas focused on *CLIL* and *CSE*, Analía Duarte encouraged the *Strategic use of L1 in the ELT classroom* and Fabiana Parano explained the importance of *Play, Drama and Storytelling* to generate room for the physical dimension in comprehensive educational practices. Cossu and Brun have also invited colleagues and students from Argentina to contribute by either being present in the interviews or suggesting questions for the interviewees, turning these accounts into a place of reunion where to get to know teachers from several regions and to knit bonds that help build a community of practice.

While all the topics discussed in the interviews are based on the foundations of social justice and the acknowledgment of gender, age, ethnic, socio-cultural and linguistic diversity, their variety captures the audience in a spiral of learning. The Freirean premise that all educational act is a political one directs the selection of speakers and the topics addressed. Each thematic axis is intertwined with the others, adding another layer of meaning, in a dialogical fashion with previous and future talks and deepening into specific subject areas. These talks not only present pedagogical theories that question classroom dynamics considered as natural, but also instill questioning as an attitude, as a practical tool to reflect upon our everyday didactic decisions and relations. Raising such topics in our own lessons or planning our action keeping them in mind in a transverse fashion, attending to our students' diversity, serves to Anijovich's *curricular or educational justice*.



Apart from interviewing authorities in the field, Cossu and Brun have been involved in many complementary academic activities shared in both accounts. They have coordinated webinars on CSE for *Macmillan* publishing house, after having designed a set of materials to accompany the coursebook *On the Pulse*, and for *English for Sharing Worldwide*, an international Argentina-based Facebook group for teachers of English, and donated the proceeds to a neighbouring shelter for women who suffer from gender violence. They have been interviewed on their specialty live by the team of *the.teaching.touch*, an Instagram account devoted to educational advice. They have represented Argentina with their article: “Comprehensive Sexuality Education with future teachers of English: An opportunity for social change through the exploration of gender stereotypes in Creating Global Change”, a compilation of 30 articles on global issues by teachers from 26 countries around the globe, material edited by Linda Ruas for the *IATEFL Global Issues SIG*. This empowerment of pre-service teachers is a decision materialised in constant actions, for example in two other talks where their own students from the Teacher Training College (TTC) 129 from Junín exchange learning experiences regarding the development of task cycles on CSE topics through the use of technological tools with students accompanied by their teacher Ana Paula Pino from TTC Paulo Freire, Tierra del Fuego, and with students guided by their teacher Flavia Bonadeo from TTC 8 Almirante Guillermo Brown, Santa Fe. The circulation of the power of the word among the different participants of learning and teaching processes enhances learning, as it is not unidirectional, it gives agency and enables the construction of a much fairer world, which is the responsibility of each of us at an individual and collective level.

The concept of *community of practice*, coined by Wenger, is what best summarises this network proposal, since it encompasses connectedness, an interest domain and classroom work, not seen as isolated labour but considering interdisciplinarity and interinstitutional collaboration. By means of sharing digital didactic materials, academic articles, experiences carried out with to-be teachers and interviews to experts, the participants are encouraged to think and rethink, to learn and unlearn. With each post, a holistic view of the teaching of English beyond the code itself and aiming at liberation is discovered and shared from the other side of the screen. There is an intention to foster the *praxis* that Freire held, which embraces *action* and *reflection*” (Freire, 2005[1970]: 79). May we all take part in this responsible quest to generate awareness and the necessary conditions for each of our students to be able to live “fully and deeply” in the world (hooks, 1994: 22).

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