



PEDAGOGY OF POSSIBILITY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS THROUGH LITERATURE AND OTHER MEDIA IN BRAZIL AND BEYOND

PEDAGOGIA DA POSSIBILIDADE EM SALAS DE AULA
DE LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA ATRAVÉS DA LITERATURA E
OUTRAS MÍDIAS NO BRASIL E EM OUTROS CONTEXTOS

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Abstract: The reflections in this article address the importance of a Pedagogy of Possibility through literature and other media in Brazil and other countries. The assumptions and proposals are underpinned by a theoretical foundation as well as experiences in teaching practicum courses and aimed at reshaping the emphasis on methods in teacher education by focusing on pedagogy. The concept of pedagogy proposed by thinkers such as Paulo Freire and Kumaravadivelu makes room for alternatives teachers can use to particularize their practices so as to meet their learners' needs combining individual objectives with social-directed goals. It is assumed that literature and other media are fruitful resources which lend themselves to achieving such purposes. In this light, this article presents some alternatives to use them in classrooms in Brazil and beyond.

Keywords: Pedagogy; Possibility; Education; English.

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Resumo: *As reflexões neste artigo abordam a importância de uma Pedagogia da Possibilidade através da literatura e outras mídias para o Brasil e outros países. Os pressupostos e propostas são sustentados por uma base teórica bem como por experiências de ensino em disciplinas de estágio supervisionado e visam redimensionar o foco nos métodos de formação de professores para uma ênfase em pedagogia. O conceito de pedagogia proposto por pensadores como Paulo Freire e Kumaravadivelu abre espaço para alternativas que os professores podem usar para particularizar suas práticas de forma a atender às necessidades dos alunos, combinando objetivos individuais com metas sociais. Assume-se que a literatura e outras mídias são recursos produtivos que podem ser usados para alcançar tais propósitos. Nesse sentido, este artigo apresenta algumas alternativas para usá-las em salas de aula no Brasil e em outros países.*

Palavras-Chave: *Pedagogia; Possibilidade; Educação; Inglês.*

STARTING POINTS

Over the years, manifold topics have been added to the repertoire of reflections in the field of English language education. They commonly figure in teacher education programs worldwide as if the particularities of the place where they are to be applied were not considered. In regard to that, on the one hand, it is important to have a common ground that would allow teachers to work in different countries in a world where borders have been fading. On the other hand, it is necessary to acknowledge the varied needs that diverse social, cultural and political contexts present.

The reflections in this article are aimed at developing countries, having Brazil as an example. The focus on Brazil is aligned with Kumaravadivelu's (2003) parameter of particularity, which implies that theories and assumptions have to be sensitive to particular contexts. Despite the importance of this parameter, the one to be emphasized in this paper is the parameter of possibility, inspired by the Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire, because it unveils the political purpose of education. It is pertinent to underline that Brazil is a developing country and, as such, should embrace goals in education that transcend the accumulation of knowledge deprived of social, cultural and political implications, and serve as a catalyst for social change.

The importance of education for social development is undeniable, but more often than not, language teachers focus their efforts in getting learners to develop either communicative or linguistic competence with little or no attention to social competence or the use of resources directed to enrich learners' repertoire of experiences through a cultural and humanistic approach. Therefore, the underlying assumption in this view is that literature and other media feature as important tools to enhance social competences towards a society in which people become more conscious of their social role and the

ability to establish and maintain dialogue is not limited to role-playing a textbook conversation.

Musings on English language teaching and the use of literature as well as other media through a Pedagogy of Possibility are the gist of this article. It also conveys reflections on postmethod pedagogy and presents arguments as well as strategies towards a literature-and-other-media-based curriculum.

A BIRD'S EYE-VIEW OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: FROM METHODS TO PEDAGOGY

The history of English language teaching is marked by a series of attempts to create effective methods that would promote the efficiency of foreign language learning. Despite consecutive attempts, they all failed in addressing the particularities presented by learners from different cultural backgrounds. The failure to achieve an all-encompassing method paved the way for the so-called postmethod pedagogy (BROWN, 2007; KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003).

As in the case of other terms prefixed by “post”, postmethod does not imply the death of methods. Instead, it refers to a revision of the concept of method and points to a blend of tenets and techniques resulting in an “alternative to method rather than an alternative method”. (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003, p. 32).

The postmethod era (BROWN, 2007) gave rise to a focus on local issues and specific aspects, which are part of a group of learners’ context, as defined by the pedagogy of particularity (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003). In this kind of pedagogy, the teacher is sensitive to the social context to which learners belong and tries to reshape strategies in order to meet his or her learners' profiles, interests, and needs. In Kumaravadivelu's words,

The parameter of particularity requires that any language pedagogy, to be relevant, must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu. (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003, p. 33).

The concept of particularity in Kumaravadivelu’s work on Postmethod pedagogy is emphasized in Douglas Brown's (2007) “The Postmethod Era: Toward Informed Approaches”, in which he maps the change from a tradition

of shifting methods to the rise of a postmethod view of teaching. The argument for an eclectic or enlightened approach stems from this view and refers to a combination of teachers' repertoire of experiences and knowledge, students' background, and what teachers observe in the classroom. Choice is a key word along with risk. On this note, Brown claims that "[t]he best teachers always take a few calculated risks in the classroom, trying new activities here and there" (BROWN, 2007, p. 43).

The avoidance of risks has been the main argument to justify the use of methods. Many teachers usually rely on methods and on textbooks as a guide for their praxis in order to ensure that contents and techniques will be in accordance with conventional standards. This belief points to how foreign language teaching is conceived, that is, under the shadow of a presumed outer authority that is legitimized, or even self-legitimized, to state how a foreign language should be taught. It also reveals the influence of traditional education, which carries the weight of a long history of past subject-matters occasionally unaligned from learners' experiences (DEWEY, 1938).

In this state of affairs, the concept of postmethod is also political. Teachers are empowered when they have the opportunity to tailor their strategies in class and make decisions that are sensitive to the students' social backdrop. In line with postmethod principles, an eclectic approach implies the use of tenets from different methods that meet the specificities of a certain group of students in a given specific context. In this sense, eclecticism and particularity are more related than they seem to be. Despite their convergences, Kumaravadivelu (1994) critiques the lack of guidelines for an eclectic method or approach. In his words,

eclecticism at the classroom level invariably degenerates into an unsystematic, unprincipled, and uncritical pedagogy because teachers with very little professional preparation to be eclectic in a principled way have little option but to randomly put together a package of techniques from various methods and label it eclectic. (KUMARAVADIVELU, 1994, p. 30)

An alternative to eclecticism is to have solid instruction on several kinds of methods. However, Kumaravadivelu (2003) outlines a different alternative, that is, the macrostrategies. Relying on Widdowson and Stern, Kumaravadivelu (1994) underscores the weaknesses of eclecticism for its lack of criteria and its relationship with the limited concept of method, proposing what he calls "Principled Pragmatism" instead, meaning "how classroom learning can be

shaped and managed by teachers as a result of informed teaching and critical appraisal” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 1994, p. 31). Principled Pragmatism is underpinned by a “sense of plausibility” (PRABHU, cited by KUMARAVADIVELU, 1994, p. 31). This sense of plausibility refers to the use of teachers’ perception on the learning setting where they teach, from which they create strategies that are effective in the particular learning context.

The reflections on Principled Pragmatism and the need for a pedagogy that addresses the triad teacher-students-social context led to the proposal of a “strategic framework for L2 teaching” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 1994, p. 32) or what Kumaravadivelu named in another text “Macrostrategic framework” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003, p. 38).

From a method-oriented perspective, Kumaravadivelu’s macrostrategies can be considered a method. Conversely, the difference uncovered by his thoughts lies in the implications that his macrostrategies comprise and in the emphasis on critical pedagogy, which implies the importance of analyzing students’ social milieu before designing teaching strategies and the course goals.

Kumaravadivelu’s proposal is tailored on the grounds of an ideology other than the one which guided the development of a series of previous methods. His macrostrategies involve parameters rather than encapsulated guidelines for teaching. To illustrate, as he proposes the maximization of learning opportunities (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003, p. 39), he does not prescribe whether this will be achieved by getting learners to be as exposed as possible to the target language in order to learn it the “natural” way, as the Natural Approach prescribes, or by engaging them in activities for the practice of functions followed by more open-ended tasks for the activation of what was practiced, as in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). He outlines macrostrategies that can underpin microstrategies in manifold contexts due to their general but not generalizing character.

Some of the macrostrategies presented in *Beyond methods* resemble tenets from the Designer Methods (BROWN, 2007), such as the focus on “learner autonomy” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003, p. 39) and “negotiated interaction” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003, p. 39). They are part of the tenets of the Silent Way, in which language is taught inductively and through self-discovery activities; as well as Community Language Learning, in which learners choose

topics for conversations and are assisted by the teacher (counselor) who provides the building blocks for interaction (BROWN, 2007).

The Designer Methods, which date back to the 1970s, were a response to the previous rise and fall of methods under contrastive purposes. Before them, methods were created to replace the previous ones through a radical shift. In this sense, for example, the emphasis on grammar rules and the reading of texts through instruction in the learners' mother tongue was replaced by the overemphasis on speaking in detriment of reading and the exclusive use of the target language in the classroom. These changes are expressed by the sequence of the following methods: Grammar Translation Method, Direct and Audiolingual Method.

As in any of the preceding methods, the Designer ones were also marked by drawbacks (BROWN, 2003). These drawbacks made room for the creation of other methods, such as CLT, which was believed to be the answer to the quest for the "perfect" method. Nonetheless, it also presented weaknesses that seemed to be overcome by a more local-directive method: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Contrary to CLT, TBLT "is an approach to the design of language courses in which the point of departure is not an ordered list of linguistic items, but a collection of tasks" (NUNAN, 1999, p. 24). TBLT allows the use of more particularized goals and subject-matters because teachers have the autonomy to reshape the tasks according to the learners' social and cultural context. Therefore, it would be in tune with the postmethod age and Pedagogy of Possibility.

THE NEED FOR PEDAGOGY OF POSSIBILITY IN BRAZIL AND BEYOND

The attention given to the students' specific context is also part of Critical Pedagogy proposed by the Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire. Along with the aforementioned parameter of particularity, there are two others proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2003), namely: practicality and possibility. The first refers to the relationship between theory and practice on a bottom-up basis, that is, instead of having teachers follow a method outlined by people who are alien to the context in which it will be implemented, they are the ones who tailor their strategies according to their classrooms. The second is about the notion of classrooms as catalysts for social transformation, embracing issues of "class,

race, gender, and ethnicity” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003, p. 36), which are part of the “subject-positions” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003, p. 36) of the agents involved in a classroom.

The Parameter or Pedagogy of Possibility is emphasized in this article because its context of production is a country where education would be the main means to prompt social, cultural, political and economic development. In a text published in 2011, Vilson Leffa reinforced the relationship between education and the aforementioned factors by asserting that, albeit some exceptions, poor students go to public schools whereas rich students go to private ones. This evidence makes him state that “[a] educação é o fator que mais discrimina no Brasil”, that is, “[e]ducation is the factor that most discriminates in Brazil” (LEFFA, 2011, p. 25, translation by the author). Based on this assertion and on experiences in public schools in the city of Salvador and metropolitan area, it is essential to discuss and disseminate a type of pedagogy that is responsive to the social and cultural void among learners of different social classes, races and sexes.

More often than estimated, pre-service teachers who had ineffective classes when they were junior high school or high school students in public schools reproduce in their classes the same strategies used by their teachers. That happens because of an atmosphere of disbelief and a tradition of “banking education” (FREIRE, 2011, p. 80), which conceives students as passive recipients of transmitted knowledge by the teacher and appears as an easy alternative for teachers who do not have in mind the power of education for social development. Nonetheless, some examples demonstrate that both this disbelief and tradition have started to give room to more meaningful practices.

What was stated by Leffa (2011) about public schools can be countered by experiences undertaken by several inspirational teachers in the country. As Chinua Achebe states, “Whenever Something Stands, Something Else Stands Beside It” (ACHEBE, 2009, p. 6), meaning that assumptions of any kind easily find counterarguments. In regard to Leffa’s words, a counterargument is the manifold fruitful experiences reported by teachers and students about English language teaching and learning at public schools. However, these examples are not as common as they could be in order to make a substantial shift to more effective results in education, which would differ from the statistical data that point to the still low number of students who successfully finish their studies, enter tertiary education and speak a foreign language.

It is pertinent to mention that the results expected by a Pedagogy of Possibility are not in line with accountability. They refer to better standards of social competence and humanistic values that would prevent citizens from insulting and hurting others for disagreeing with their point of view, for instance. They also refer to a necessary critical attitude towards neoliberal models internalized by the consumption of consumerism as represented in the media in general such as in advertisements, TV series, and films.

The results expected from contexts where the Pedagogy of Possibility is implemented involve the project of constructing a country with more readers of literature, viewers of films that represent hope, social awareness, unselfishness, and individual objectives embracing collective goals, extensive to the community or, in other words, with more critical citizens.

LITERATURE AND OTHER MEDIA FOR MORE SOCIAL-ORIENTED CLASSROOMS

David Nunan (1999) presents clear arguments for the focus on Experiential Models and Constructivism, which are aligned with the principles of Critical Pedagogy. Among these principles, it is relevant to cite the view that knowledge should be transformed rather than transmitted, that teachers and learners can learn from and with each other, and that process should prevail over product (NUNAN, 1999, p. 7). These tenets lack, however, the social-directed tone that developing countries need.

Many authors, like Nunan (1999), aim at empowering students and raising their autonomy. In spite of the pertinence of these reflections for strengthening learners' potential, the underlying goals are usually individualistic. Nunan (1999), for example, states the need for a culture-sensitive teaching practice, but does not emphasize the importance of using knowledge for social transformation. That can be inferred by analyzing the author's subject-position. Nunan comes from a postcolonial country that is now a developed country. In developed settings, individualistic goals prevail over collective ones, since social inequity is not so deep.

On the other hand, in developing countries, individualistic aims nurture a system of competition and search for the best standards that diverge with their structure of inequity. This system of competition is part of the Right wing purposes, which contrasts with the Left wing ones, as Andrew Stables states:

“[the Right Wing] may focus attention on standards, excellence and accountability, the Left on equality, fairness and social justice”. (STABLES, 2015, p. 42). These two different purposes might overlap and the Right and Left dichotomy may prove itself fragile. Nonetheless, in places where the Right is most representative, measures aimed at “standards, excellence and accountability” often deepen the social gap between those who are under unprivileged situations due to inequity and the privileged ones.

Regardless of the political orientation in a country, in a milieu of inequity, the pattern to be pursued should not be directed exclusively to individual aims. They should be combined with social development on a collective basis. This implies that those who have had access to education or privileges should be committed to provide the tools for the social ascension of others. To achieve this goal, education is the most effective means that can be enriched through the use of literature and other media.

The media are a substantial part of students’ daily lives and they could be a pathway to use literature in the classroom; however, oftentimes, they are conceived as opposed to literature and seen through hierarchical lenses (PRIETO, 2015). This opposition has long been deconstructed by the cultural studies, which recognized the relevance of diverse modes of cultural expression, thus displacing the hierarchy among the arts and other kinds of cultural production.

In this vein, in the contemporary and postmodern classroom, movies, songs and TV series can work as the means to literature through intersemiotic translation. In a country where only fifty six percent of the population claims to read books (FAILLA, 2016, p. 27), teachers should not expect to have learners who would be intrinsically motivated to study a foreign language through the sole use of literary texts. It is advisable to contextualize these texts through pre-reading activities and relate them to other media or even present them through their intersemiotic translation to cinema, music and soap operas, as portrayed by Prieto’s (2015) experience teaching a course named “Literatura em língua inglesa e multimodalidades: Shakespeare e a telenovela” in which Shakespeare’s *The taming of the Shrew* is taught along with the Brazilian soap opera *O cravo e a rosa* – an intersemiotic translation of the Shakespearian play.

TOWARDS A LITERATURE-AND-OTHER-MEDIA-BASED CURRICULUM

Décio Cruz (2004) underscores the importance of the use of movies in foreign language classrooms. The author shares his experiences with literature as both a foreign language student and then as a teacher. He created a course called “Adventures in Reading and Discussion” (CRUZ, 2004, p. 150), devoted to teaching English through literature, specifically by means of literary texts adapted to another medium, such as cinema or music. According to the author, the word “literature” did not figure in the name of the course because of its association with traditional teaching of literature at regular schools. He reports that the course was very successful and the students read different genres of literary texts.

Cruz (2004) narrates his experiments with literature in courses aimed at teaching English as a foreign language and presents insightful strategies for beginning teachers. For instance, he proposes the use of literature for oral comprehension activities whereby students would have access to several varieties of the English language; and improve conversational skills by addressing cultural aspects.

The strategies presented by Cruz (2004) may look unattainable by some teachers at regular schools. At least, that is the impression from experiences shared by some students of teaching practicum courses and teachers of primary and secondary education in Salvador and the metropolitan area.

The difficulties for the implementation of classes in which literature and other media are some of the resources lie in various factors. Teachers and pre-service teachers mention lack of equipment and material, learners’ lack of motivation, lack of reading habit, constraints of time and curriculum issues. These drawbacks might hinder the implementation of a literature-and-other-media-based approach or curriculum. Nevertheless, they do not exclude the possibility of using literary texts, movies, songs and so forth in some classes for the sake of providing students with different tools to learn the language. The aforementioned media also give them access to cultures of the countries where the target language is spoken as well as other human experiences which can facilitate the exercise of respect through the fruitful pathways of otherness.

Because of the resistance identified in the discourse of experienced and beginning teachers to the use of literature in English classes, the text “Literatura e(m) ensino de língua estrangeira” (PEREIRA, 2010) was written. This article

presents some procedures for the use of literary texts in free language schools as well as regular schools, illustrating them with a play and a novel: *Pygmalion* by Bernard Shaw and *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe through viewing and/or reading activities. The activities are designed under a meaningful theme like linguistic prejudice, discussed through the play, and colonialism, through Defoe's novel. The article also proposes the intersection of two major fields in the area of Humanities, specifically linguistics and literature. These fields are usually conceived in a contrastive mode despite the fact they are both interwoven in two main interrelated fields: language and culture. The intersection of these different fields expresses the possibility of combining diverse kinds of knowledge in teaching practices.

What the principles that have been presented and experiences in Teaching Practicum courses demonstrate is that it is feasible to apply the theoretical underpinning studied at college to any learning context as long as topics are adapted and tailored according to the learners' profile, needs and interests.

An illustration of the use of literature in secondary education or free language schools is the teaching of the short story "The welcome table" by Alice Walker (2001). This text tells the story of an elderly black woman who was heading to the church when she was prevented from getting into it because of the attendees' racial and social discrimination. Sad as the story looks, it can lend itself to reflections on prejudice of all kinds and the feeling of exile that non-whites still endure.

To teach a lesson on "The welcome table", through the light of the Pedagogy of Possibility, the pre-service teacher would have students brainstorm words and expressions related to an umbrella term: prejudice. This is a strategy to present some words that students would find in the text.

After brainstorming ideas, the teacher would get students to share why they have mentioned those words and relate them to the plot of the short story. At this point, the teacher would elicit what students know about African American history, for instance, and how it could be related to African Brazilian experiences and the consequences of diaspora. The elicitation of ideas about the African Diaspora could work as an enriching interdisciplinary activity with History and it could even figure as a cross-curricular topic involving other subjects as well.

The discussion on the African Diaspora leads to reflections on slavery and the marks left by this system in representations of black people in white literature. That could work as a transition to discuss the importance of black literature in the curriculum of regular schools and the contribution that such a topic can give to widen people's perspective about the harmful consequences of slavery, not always sensed through the study of information and historical listing of "facts" on textbooks.

In order to activate previous knowledge, the teacher would ask students what the symbol of the welcome table suggests and elicit some ideas. This procedure is a top-down processing (RICHARDS, 2008) procedure aimed at evoking students' repertoire of experiences and previous knowledge to help them interpret texts. The teacher finds room in this interpretation of the title to discuss a figure of speech – irony – that lies in the use of the word "welcome" and the symbol of the "welcome table" in a story that narrates a situation in which a woman is unwelcomed at the church.

Following these introductory stages, the teacher would get students to read the first paragraphs of the short story and identify cognates and words they already know. The underlying purpose of this bottom-up processing (RICHARDS, 2008) technique, that is, the study of small units of meaning in the listening or reading of a text, is to teach the target language "from the known to the new" (NUNAN, 1999, p. 6), relying on words that students already know and are able to identify.

From this point of the lesson onwards, the teacher would get students to read the paragraphs again and share with their classmates what they could understand on a cooperative learning (BROWN, 2007) basis and, then, share their interpretations as a whole group. The discussions should provide the raw material (keywords, sentences) that would be written on the board for the production of the retelling of the story through a comic book on a Task-Based Language Teaching fashion. The comic books would convey plots referring to racial and social discrimination in a bilingual version so that parents and other people from the students' community could also read them. Instead of a comic book, they could also produce role-plays or even poems to express the sorrow and the day-dreaming joy portrayed in the short story.

As another variation of this activity, students could also be engaged in the production of a *collage*. According to Harry Samuels, *collage* "offers students an excellent venue for self-expression" (SAMUELS, 2013, p. 6) and they do not

require artistic skills. Another reason for the use of this kind of activity is that the production of meaning through different media amplifies the aesthetic experience and helps students deepen their understanding of the text because they have to apprehend meaning to generate new meanings through creativity.

The teaching of “The Welcome Table” could be also accompanied by the study of lyrics by singers like Nina Simone or others of Black expression, an introduction to blues, jazz, and spirituals along with discussions on TV series and movies.

The importance of addressing stories about black people resides in what Chinua Achebe (2000) and Chimamanda Adichie (2009) call a “balance of stories”. In textbooks and syllabuses worldwide, there are stories and representations that do not often contemplate black people and when they are represented they are commonly depicted with the shades of stereotypes or, what Adichie (2009) calls a “single story”.

The example given to illustrate the use of literature and other media was intentional. Its purpose is based on a particular cause, which is to widen the access to black literature so that readers have access to stories, body and tradition of black culture mirrored in the texts they read. This purpose is associated with the intention to deconstruct the predominance of hegemonic stories in the field of education so as to achieve a level of equity among stories and representations, the so called “balance of stories”, that can inspire equity in other fields as well.

FINAL REMARKS

Literature is a very enriching resource in English classes and a source of stories that help teachers and learners write a different chapter of educational experiences in Brazilian classrooms and beyond. In developing countries, education should not be alien to the learners’ social and economic context and should focus on social transformation, as advocated by the Pedagogy of Possibility.

To make the learning process meaningful, appealing and effective, teachers can use different methods, means, and media to widen their students’ knowledge towards a society with excellence in humane and humanizing values.

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