

APPROACHES TO TEACHING GLOBAL ENGLISH LITERATURES IN THE *ENSINO FUNDAMENTAL II* CLASSROOM: HYBRIDITY, OWNERSHIP, AND DIALOGUE

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ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss the importance of instilling a sense of ownership of foreign language in beginning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, as members of a growing community of non-native speakers of this international, technological language. What motivates the (pre-)adolescent student, who is beginning to articulate his or her distinct subjectivity, to cathect a foreign language, incorporating new perspectives, experiences, and expanding possibilities of emergent identity, characterized by hybridity and dialogue? One critical literacy approach explored by the PIBID (Programa Institucional de Bolsa de Iniciação à Docência) groups I coordinate takes global English literatures as its theme. As Festino (2011) shows, global English literature “engages the learner in a critical act of reflection” at the same time as it raises cross-cultural awareness. This paper explores basic strategies and techniques for introducing global literature at the *Fundamental II* level. Our PIBID groups have been successful in increasing students’ contact with English language, literature, books, and film; improving reading comprehension; creating activities with communicative and intercultural uses of English; and engaging students across the disciplines. Sample activities and planning principles will be discussed.

Key words: English as a Foreign Language, Global English Literatures, Hybridity

Introduction

The teaching of foreign languages and their literatures faces a range of challenges in Brazilian public schools, from inadequate teacher preparation to reduced class time in the curriculum. However one of the best-known problems relates to student, teacher and community beliefs about the value or relevance of the subject material for students, as well as the capacity of public school teachers to teach the material (MOITA LOPES, 1996). This

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leads to weaker student motivation, decreased proficiency, and a culture of teaching and learning language and literature that is mostly ineffective in the region of Minas Gerais where I lecture in the English Teacher Education program of a federal university. It might seem counterintuitive, then, to introduce literary studies during the middle school years, let alone in a foreign language - in this case, English, the most frequently taught foreign language in Brazil. However, the PIBID outreach project I coordinate, Global English Literatures in Basic Education, proposes to do just that. The answer as to why and how we have found this to be an exciting and promising intervention, which I will discuss in this paper, relates to creating relevance and ownership of the English language among pre-teens and young adolescent students in urban, high-needs public schools.

Local contexts are essential to reading our project proposal, given Brazil's high level of diversity (DINIZ et al, 2011). Our project is located in the interior of Minas Gerais state, approximately 90 km from the capital of Belo Horizonte. I would like to begin with a few observations regarding student behavior and "indiscipline," often attributed to a lack of student motivation. In my role as co-coordinator of the curricular teaching practicum (*estágio supervisionado*), I recently observed a student teacher attempt to 'control' a classroom (literally translating the teaching lexicon commonly used among my student-teachers- *ter controle*) in one of the state schools where my scholarship students work with the project. The students, in the seventh year of *Ensino Fundamental*, were indeed very distracted and talkative, but basically organized and ready to learn. There were a number of reasons the student teacher was not able to capture her students' attention. That is not my main concern here, but rather the classroom dynamics, traced through the gazes of the students. While the student teacher led activities on prepositions of location, few girls were looking into compact mirrors, applying garish lipstick. Another girl used white-out to design elaborate patterns on her own hands, which she then presented to her classmates and admired as she waited for some direction from the student teacher. While the student teacher read these actions as disrespectful, which led to the breakdown of classroom dynamics, one could also see them as signs of creativity, wonder, desire to be and become.

Literature- and especially global literatures in a foreign language- when appropriately selected and presented can be a mirror for "acts of critical reflection" (FESTINO 2011 p. 52), the gazing into the self in order to comprehend the gaze of the other.

It is a foundation of dialogue. At the same time global literatures can offer a motivating frame for language learning, and learning about self and subjectivity, an essential topic for any teenaged student. While often unfamiliar with literature in English or concerned that students will not have the necessary linguistic level, teachers can, through continued education and partnership with universities, embrace the contexts offered by world literatures in English to create relevance and engagement for language learning. We have found that the low linguistic level of students in *Ensino Fundamental II* does not impede the success of language classes created in multimodal dialog with literary works, ranging from graphic novels to plays and poetry. Brazilian teaching of English must shift from exclusive to inclusive; students must feel part of the language, as if it belongs to them and they, to it, in order to create the possibility for meaning and learning.

Theoretical Foundations and Contexts

The PIBID project “Global English Literatures in Basic Education” departs from the idea that English is no longer strictly associated with hegemonic nations nor can the model of the native speaker be wielded as a means to unify and standardize English language learning (RAJAGOPALAN 2008; CANAGARAJAH 2007). On the contrary, non-native speakers now outnumber native speakers and English as an international language or *Lingua Franca*, as the language of the internet and globalization, can belong to anyone who chooses to learn it and use it beyond national borders. Examples abound of how English is increasingly a language for Brazilians to use, including in a literary context, and such examples may be discussed with students to stimulate their awareness of this phenomenon (LOURENÇO 2011). One recent example is the Brazilian author Bruna Brito, writing as Lilian Carmine, who self-published her English-language novel “The Lost Boys” on the internet site Wattpad in order to increase her audience. Brito was mostly self-taught in English, having studied the language minimally in school. Nevertheless, an English publisher, Gillian Green, from Random House, read the novel on the website and Brito received a contract to have her novel published (COZER 2013). Another example is the recent filmic adaptation of a literary biography, *Flores raras e banalíssimas*, in which the Brazilian actress Gloria Pires interpreted the role of Lota de Macedo Soares. The majority of

the script was in English, which Pires recounted as a significant challenge, but despite this, she was able to make the language her own and develop a “command voice” (BRISOLLA 2013). Understanding this broader popular context and movement of “glocalization” (SHARIFIAN 2013), students may become more motivated and feel connected to the material to be studied.

In an effort to decentralize the study of English literatures (and related cultural production, such as film and music), the project focuses on mostly post-colonial or multilingual contexts of English use, such as Nigeria, India, Australia, and the Caribbean, as well as from the African American community in the United States. These regions tend to represent perspectives more similar to those of Brazilian students, as part of a post-colonial and BRIC nation, which remains an emerging economy on a global scale. While English proficiency provides numerous opportunities for international participation, for younger teenagers, it also provides a way of understanding self and becoming.

Reading in English for instrumental purposes has always been considered a skill "relevant " to Brazilians, as stated in the National Curriculum Parameters for Foreign Language (PCNs-LE) (BRAZIL, 1998). However, fifteen years after the publication of that document, the teaching of English in basic education is still based mainly on the teaching of grammatical and lexical content. Thus, reading in English still occupies a problematic place in the school classroom, often seen as an exercise in translation, with little or no connection with the other skills, contradicting the principles of communicative language teaching (BROWN, 2007; RICHARDS; RODGERS, 2001). According Marins Costa (2012), most of the teacher education programs still constitute the disciplines of language and language teaching in traditional patterns, considering the foreign language as a fixed system and focusing more on static rules and content to be "passed" on to students, while also creating false divisions between theory and practice. Within this methodology, we have a still outdated focus on reading, both in undergraduate programs and in the public school classroom. The focus on reading is based two primary reasons: weak oral skills on the part of teachers, and the demands of the entrance examinations to higher education, the university entrance exam and ENEM that test this ability and not the others (speaking, listening and writing). So if we are seeking the transformation of language teaching, why institute a literature project, which may seem more traditional?

Literature, beyond instrumentality, can create new ways of understanding reality itself (FESTINO 2011), and may cause changes at various levels: in basic education, in the training and licensing of teachers, and in the concept of what a language is. As Perrenoud states, "Teachers are active mediators and interpreters of cultures, values and knowledge in transformation" (PERRENOUD, 1999, p.23). However, to develop this possibility, a change in the approach used in reading and consequently in initial teacher training, is essential. The practice of reading does not necessarily have to conceive of language as static or fixed, and literature can serve as a starting point for the exploration and teaching of the four macroskills, along with the culture. Since reading occupies a privileged place in the schools and university undergraduate courses, we can seek to change the ways in which reading and language are imagined, affecting the teaching of other skills as well, as proposed by the Curriculum Guidelines for Secondary Education (MENEZES DE SOUZA; MONTE MÓR, 2006). However, one must also take into account the importance of reading and literature with regards to the foreign language teacher education program. This course of study within the university was designed to be "a place of culture and creative imagination, able to intervene in society, transforming it in ethical terms" (PEDAGOGICAL PROJECT, p. 23). According to this document, the degree in English Teaching should contribute to the "improvement of education in the country," with up-to-date professional preparation (ibid. p. 26). This requires the integration of new concepts of language and language acquisition, and the new digital tools that support the learning and affect the concept of "text" and literacy itself. As pointed Festino (2011), nowadays, the English language is considered an international language and not merely national. This new view of language changes our teaching practice and thus also demands changes in both our initial and continuing teacher training. In today's globalized and technologized world, there are several "English languages," various global and local cultures in constant dialogue and change. The study of literature in the English language involves not only linguistic knowledge, but also encourages critical reflection on various cultures involved, including the Brazilian culture (FESTINO 2011, p. 54-55).

Understanding the acquisition of language as a complex process, and language as a Complex Adaptive System (CAS), it becomes necessary to look for ways to engage students through literature (in particular, narrative) and seek out "the edge of chaos," a space characterized by risk, research and experimentation, and where the learning of a second

language is optimized (PAIVA 2010). When we think of English as a CAS, it becomes even more complex given the international role of language, definitively shifted from an authoritarian site of production. This concept of English as a global language or “World Englishes” (RAJAGOPALAN, 2007) transfers power from the center to the periphery and disperses the authority of the native speaker, in this case, through the literature produced not only in the countries of the traditional canon of literature in English (U.S. and U.K.), but also in other post colonial and post modern countries (such as Nigeria and China) (DUBOC; FERRAZ 2011).

This change in the concept of language is linked to the current Critical Literacy approach that seeks “o desenvolvimento de habilidades que capacitem o cidadão a ler criticamente as práticas sociais e institucionais e a perceber a construção social e situada do texto e da linguagem por meio de compreensão das suas fontes, propósitos, interesses e condições de produção” (DUBOC 2012, p. 83). However, in traditional English classrooms, this transformation does not have a way to happen. The question then becomes how to translate theory into practice, both in the classroom and in initial and continuing teacher education. More recently, Duboc (2012, p. 87) suggests teaching in “gaps” or slippages that occur in the classroom, using an “atitude curricular nas brechas de sala de aula como mecanismo de ressignificação pedagógica.” Our project “Global Literatures,” then, aims to act in those gaps inside and outside the classroom, enabling the learning of language and culture through new approaches and these new “hybrid” educational spaces. Projects, like PIBID, can themselves – much like literary texts – be thought of as a “contact zone.” This expression invokes the idea of hybridity, resulting from cultural contact. The hybrid space is the one in which self, otherwise polarized and bounded by identifiers, finds a place to flourish and provides contact or translation between cultures or identities (SOJA, 1996; BHABHA, 2000, 2003). It is the space where new forms of thinking and interpretation may develop, through understanding of the “other” and his/her perspective. This dialog with otherness is essential to critical literacy, and narratives move students from a structuralist view of foreign language to one imbued with meaning and communicative possibilities beyond “textbook” situations.

Global English Literatures in Basic Education

The PIBID (CAPES) project, at the national level, seeks to improve teacher education programs by getting university students involved in educational activities in local public K-12 schools, preferentially prior to the teaching practicum. The principal objective of this scholarship program is to encourage students to pursue a teaching career in the Brazilian public school system. The project provides ample support, both pedagogically and financially, and increases student contact time with schools. The area coordinator, a university professor from the teacher education program, can advise up to 20 scholarship students. Each group of 5-10 scholarship students is advised, in the public school, by a supervising teacher. All involved earn a monthly stipend and the project itself has funding for consumable materials and more limited funding for participation in conferences, minicourses, and so on. Weekly meetings allow for teacher development and content knowledge development. Virtual contexts for exchange and discussion, as well as content delivery, exist through Facebook and a website designed for the project. Students work in teams to implement the project proposal, adapted to the local school context and needs. In our project, students teach workshops, sometimes during regular class and in the classroom, but sometimes in other spaces such as the courtyard, library, or even outside of school, through short field trips. In our project, we aim to motivate students to study English, enjoy reading, and connect, through literature, to both foreign cultures and Brazilian culture.

It is important to note that the amount of time spent in schools through PIBID, around 10 hours weekly, can be much higher than the amount of time spent in the four semesters of teaching practicum. In the university where this project is located, in accordance with national laws and directives, student teachers spend 420 hours in the teaching practicum, but only a fraction of this is actually spent in the schools, and even less in actual teaching scenarios.

Suggested literary activities for *Ensino Fundamental II* Classrooms

Given critical literacy and literature's intended impact, activities and lessons involving literature must also be explicitly connected to students' experiences and previous

knowledge. Literature must not be made to be static as well, a rubric of facts and summaries to be memorized and tested. If the students do not perceive a connection to the text, an urgency towards reading and understanding, there will be little impetus to “make contact.” Instilling ownership by actively displaying the hybrid space – that space where self and other encounter one another – in interactive, multimodal pre-reading and post-reading activities has catalyzed intrinsic motivation in otherwise “difficult” classes who, most likely, were not considered candidates for literary studies, in any language.

All activities had both in-school and online components, through blogs. Several successful activities connected film and literature, or music and literature. Music, in particular, has allowed for short critical literacy activities centering on lyrics. An activity done with Michael Jackson’s song “Cry” about the environment, and another with Bob Marley’s songs and biography, generated considerable interest among students. For film showings, students were brought to the university, because of space and equipment limitations at the local schools. This added an additional factor of interest for students, who enjoying moving outside of traditional spaces of learning. Tutoring services were made available with additional activities and language practice.

Another successful workshop held at a state school was entitled “What is a book?”. For this workshop, scholarship students organized a field trip to a local printing press, where school students were walked through, step by step, the process of how a book is made, from the initial idea to the final product. Students were able to observe how the machines worked, and see examples of books at various stages of production. After this, the students returned to the library to appreciate how those books might have been made. Subsequently, they made their own small books, using English and drawings.

Scholarship students continue to work and plan activities around the project proposal, including graphic novels and world poetries. A recent poetry workshop used group work and several extra tutors to create interactive conditions and tease out possible meanings of short poems from India, St. Lucia, and the United States, which were then illustrated and put on display. These diverse workshops and activities will culminate, in 2013-2, in a school-wide literary festival, including the Map of World Literatures Fair. Students will prepare materials for booths representing diverse countries where English is used in literature. Each

booth will offer information and some examples of literature and other cultural products from these countries.

Conclusions

While public school culture, in many regions of Brazil, does not favor the teaching and study of literature (in Portuguese or English) (LOURENÇO 2011), it is possible to influence school culture with dedicated activities. Even beginning English as a foreign language students can be stimulated to further study by immersing them in complex but accessible narratives, mediated by ample contextualization and multimodal activities. Students enjoy learning about literature from new perspectives, and, importantly, it makes for exciting possibilities for teaching, emphasizing the role of English as part of the development of critical thinking skills, essential for global citizenship.

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