CRITICAL FORMATION IN ENGLISH TEACHING: REFLEXIONS ABOUT PRACTICUM

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents the analysis of five didactic sequences developed in the Practicum – during Letras (Língua Inglesa e Literaturas) course at Universidade do Estado da Bahia (UNEB) in 2014 – in a critical perspective. The aim is to reflect how the proposed activities contributed for a critical formation of the learners as well as to suggest other methodological paths in English teaching. Thus, this work is a bibliography research whereby I used the theoretical categories worked by authors in Education and Linguistic areas. Also, this work is a documental research whereby I promoted analytical treatment to the didactic sequences based on the theoretical framework. The results pointed out that: 1) the activities developed in the Practicum presented a social function, and therefore, a critical perspective. However, there are remnants of Traditional Pedagogy; 2) English teachers have difficulties in proposing meaningful activities for learners, and; 3) it is important to approximate the discourses and practices between university and school to build on effective educational critical practices.

KEYWORDS: English teaching; critical formation; practicum.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper is a reflection-on-action whereby I can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the experiences of my own practice in the fourth Practicum during my Letras (Língua Inglesa e Literaturas) course at Universidade do Estado da Bahia (UNEB) in 2014. In this work, I can think back on the project I undertook, the situations I lived through during the Practicum, and I can explore the understandings I have brought to the handling of the case (SHÖN, 1983). Considering the specificities of each educational context in which each English teacher is inserted, it is conspicuous the importance of the reflective teacher action, not only to understand her/his approach, but also and mainly to intervene in her/his reality (JORGE, 2003).

Thereby, my main objective is to analyze the didactic sequences developed to the Practicum in a critical perspective in order to reflect how the proposed activities contributed to a critical formation of the learners, as well as to point out other methodological paths in English teaching. Thus, this work is a bibliography research whereby I used the theoretical categories worked by authors in Education namely Freire (2005; 2011) and Saviani (2003; 2013) and diverse authors in the Linguistic area such as Cox & Assis-Peterson (1999), Stein (2000), Unsworth (2001), Zeichner

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(2003), Hawkins & Norton (2009), and Cope & Kalantzis (2009). Also, this work is a documental research whereby I promoted analytical treatment to the didactic sequences based on the theoretical framework (SEVERINO, 2007).

Bearing in mind a critical approach triggers reflection, I aim to achieve a critical level of it, incorporating moral and ethical criteria into the discourse about my practical action discussed in this work. At this third level of reflection (the critical one), the discussion intends to go beyond the first and the second levels, the technical and the practical ones. The technical level concerns "the efficient and effective application of educational knowledge for the purposes of attaining ends which are accepted as given" (ZEICHNER; LISTON, 1987, p. 24). The second one concerns the problem of "explicating and clarifying the assumptions and predispositions underlying practical affairs and assessing the educational consequences toward an action". (ZEICHNER; LISTON, 1987, p. 25). Both reflection levels are related to the micro context of education, in other words, inside classroom actions. However, the proposal in this reflection is to break the boundaries of the classroom in order to reflect about how the Practicum classes should intervene into the macro context in which the learners live.

It is important to stress that the word *critical* does not mean being negative but "it refers to the stance of enabling us as teachers to see our actions in relation to the historical, social, and cultural context in which our teaching is actually embedded" (Bartlett, 1990, p. 205).

2 THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AND THE NECESSITY FOR A CRITICAL THEORY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Throughout time, the role of education has been redefined around the globe in order to improve its quality and make it accessible for all. In the 19th century, when the bourgeoisie represented the power of society, the national educational systems emerged aiming the emancipation and liberation of the individual to rescue her/him from marginality. To this Traditional Pedagogy, marginality is synonym of ignorance, thus, the school emerges as an antidote to ignorance. In this theory, the education was centered on teacher. This professional was seen as a transmitter of knowledge and the learners seen as receivers of this knowledge. In the end of the century, before the failure of this theory, the New School emerged (SAVIANI, 2003).

The New School proposed a new way of interpreting education. In this conception, the marginalized is no longer the ignorant, but the excluded and rejected individual socially. With the discovery of human differences, this new pedagogy generalized the biological and psychical "abnormalities" in the individual and then, the marginalized was seen as the "abnormal". Thus, the

education, as a factor of social equalization, is seen as a tool to correct marginality, aiming to adjust and adapt these individuals to society, and to accept and respect the specific individualities. This pedagogy defends the idea that the important is not to learn, but learn to learn. This idea downgraded the educational level for working classes and improved the education quality for dominant classes (SAVIANI, 2003).

In the first half of 20th century, a new pedagogy emerged focusing on the industrial work. This other way of seeing education aimed to render the educational process an objective and operational process to minimize the subjective interference that could hinder the effectiveness of the theory. Here, the marginalized is seen as the incompetent, unproductive, in the technical sense. In other words, the education is due to the economic demands of society and, therefore, it aimed to increase productivity. A new "slogan" is argued: learn to do (SAVIANI, 2003).

These theories are named by Saviani (2003) as non-critical theories. They consider the question of marginalization as a deviation whereby the education has the function of correction. So, they only consider the action of education on society. On the other hand, there are the critical-reproductive theories. These ones see education from its social conditions.

> Nevertheless, as in the analyses developed by them, they invariably conclude that the own function of education is the reproduction of society in which it is inserted. Therefore, they deserve their nomination of critical-reproductive theories. (SAVIANI, 2003, p. 16)[1]

These theories exerted influence in Latin America throughout the 1970s and triggered some critical studies about education. Nonetheless, as Saviani (2003) adds, they disseminated a pessimistic mood among educators for they considered that education could not be different from the way it was. Besides, although they had explained the way the school is constituted, they did not present a pedagogical proposal neither believed in a critical teaching practice. From then on, it has aroused the necessity of discussing about a new proposal that goes beyond the non-critical and critical-reproductive visions in order to provide and build on effective emancipation of the dominated classes.

3 THE CRITICAL THEORY

Critical Pedagogy was rooted by the educator Paulo Feire in the early 1960s, when he was involved in the Folk Culture Movement of Recife/PE, coordinating a Project for Adult Literacy. His proposal was based on a method that aimed to make the adults of the lower classes aware of

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[1] All translated quotations from the Portuguese are of the author.

their social roles in order to promote social changes. Thus, in contrast to the Traditional Pedagogy, Freire defended people emancipation and empowerment to change oppressive conditions (COX; ASSIS-PETERSON, 1999; GADOTTI, 1989).

In his work *Pedagogia do oprimido*, firstly published in 1968, Freire criticizes the traditional educational model, where learners have a passive role. He also proposes the emancipation of the marginalized individuals. Freire, as well as Costa (2012), defines the marginalized as the individual that is on the fringe of society. However, he highlights that these named marginalized were never on the fringe of it. They were always inside an organization that made them the oppressed ones. Thereby, he adds that the solution for these marginalized is not in 'integrating themselves' or in 'incorporating themselves' to this organization that oppresses them, but in emancipating themselves in order to become autonomous beings (FREIRE, 2005, 2011).

According to Cox & Assis-Peterson (1999), the path of Critical Pedagogy in Brazil was obstructed when, after the dissemination of his ideas and practices, Paulo Freire was imprisoned and exiled. In his return in 1979, the word *critical* becomes a subject under discussion by politicized intellectuals and there was the rebirth of this pedagogy. Concomitantly with Freire's ideas and influenced by him, other educators' proposals raised in 1980s in Brazil, e.g. Historical-critical Pedagogy by Saviani. In this time, his pedagogical proposal was adopted by some official teaching systems, especially in Paraná and Santa Catarina. About a critical theory of teaching, Saviani (2003, p. 31) argues:

> From a practical point of view, it is vigorously to resume the struggle against selectivity, discrimination and lowering of teaching of the lower classes. To struggle against marginalization by school means to engage in the effort to ensure to the workers a best possible teaching under current historical conditions. The role of a critical theory of education is to give concrete substance to this struggle in order to prevent it from appropriating and articulating with the dominant interests.

Under this same perspective, Hawkins & Norton (2009, p. 31) point out that critical "refers to a focus on how dominant ideologies in society drive the construction of understandings and meanings in ways that privilege certain groups of people, while marginalizing others".

There is a shift in the kind of teaching in many countries that goes on inside classrooms in order to improve the educational quality and equity. Zeichner (2003, p. 3) remarks that this shift "moves away from autocratic teacher-centered classrooms […] to a form of teaching that is more learner-centered and culturally relevant".

For Zeichner (2003, p. 4), this reform in education includes:

> Valuing learners' life experiences and current understandings as the starting point for instruction, respecting the cultural and linguistic resources that pupils bring to school instead of viewing them as deficits if they are different than the dominant ones, using local materials and natural resources as the basis for the curriculum materials, fostering a higher degree of learner participation, discussion and contribution in the classroom, focusing on learners' understandings of the subject matter and not on memorization and rote repetition, and focusing on developing learners' abilities to use their newly acquired understandings in meaningful and authentic life situations.

Thus, from this conception of critical, it raised the critical (multi)literacies perspective.

4 CRITICAL (MULTI)LITERACIES PERSPECTIVE AND THE ENGLISH TEACHERS' ROLE

Under Freire's perspective, authors such as Costa (2012), Soares (2011), and Rojo (2009), have defined Critical Literacy as a commitment to reshape literacy education focusing on marginalized groups in society. Since Freire's work, authors have emphasized the critical function of reading that it is not limited to the decoding of the linguistic code, but also it is about the use of reading and writing in social situations.

The Orientações Curriculares para o Ensino Médio (BRAZIL, 2006) agree with the need for the work of reading by EFL (English as Foreign Language) teachers, but indicate some changes of a theoretical nature that should influence this practice namely literacy and multiliteracy theories. So, the document highlights the importance of adopting them and working with multimodal resources in order to contribute to expand the world view of the learners, to work the sense of citizenship, and to develop critical skills. Unsworth (2001) also emphasizes the importance of the multimodal nature of texts in developing literacy practices.

These new literacies practices "are embodied in new social practices – ways of working in new or transformed forms of employment, new ways of participating as a citizen in public spaces and even perhaps new forms of identity and personality" (COPE; KALANTZIS, 2009, p. 167). The learners are involved in those new literacies practices related to their social contexts, that is why it is important to work with them in classroom in order to make meaning mainly for the learners involved in the process of learning. According to Stein (2000, p. 333):

> In the act of making meaning, learners produce multiple signs in textual forms across semiotic modes, drawing on different representational resources in order to succeed in that domain. The design of such text is constrained by genres, languages, and discursive practices that are valued within the broader sociocultural and political context of education […].

In this sense, Cope and Kalantzis (2009, p. 166-172) explain the objectives of multiliteracy pedagogy:

> Whereas traditional literacy curriculum was taught to a singular standard (grammar, literary canon, standard national forms of the language), everyday experiences of meaning making was increasingly one of negotiating discourse differences. A pedagogy of multiliteracies would need to address this as a fundamental aspect of contemporary teaching and learning. […] The multiliteracies approach suggests a pedagogy for active citizenship, centred on learners as agents in their own knowledge, capable of contributing their own as well as negotiating the differences between one community and the next.

A review developed by Bezemer and Kress (2009) points out significant changes in textbooks for secondary education in English in terms of social semiotic. But, it is not enough if teachers are not prepared to deal with them. In order to achieve multiliteracy pedagogy objectives, English teachers should assume a critical role in society and have an attitude of responsibility in their works. For Zeichner & Liston (1996), as mentioned by Bailey (2012, p. 24), being responsible:

> involves thinking about at least three kinds of consequences of one's teaching: (1) personal consequences – the effects of one's teaching on pupil self-concepts; (2) academic consequences – the effects of one's teaching on pupils' intellectual development; and (3) social and political consequences – the projected effects of one's teaching on the life changes of various pupils.

This third kind of consequence involves the critical level, aiming to cause effects not only inside classroom, but also outside, in the social contexts. Bearing in mind "formal contexts of teaching and learning are spaces where the learners have the opportunity to develop themselves as reflective, active, and critical citizens" (GIROUX, 1997 apud GREGGIO; GIL, 2010, p. 64).

Franson and Holliday (2009) also remark that teachers should be able to understand deeply the complexity of social and cultural issues, considering that English teaching includes not only the linguistic features of the language "and how these may be taught and learned, but also its social and cultural position in the word and its subsequent impacts on the lives of both teachers and language learners" (p. 40). In the same way, the Orientações Curriculares para o Ensino Médio (BRAZIL, 2006, p. 101) point out that "each language, far from being homogeneous, is made up of sociocultural variants"

Considering these discussions and concepts concerning about a critical approach in education, the following topics present and analyze the proposal of the Practicum and the didactic sequences developed to it. Also, a reflection about the proposed activities and other methodological paths in English teaching.

5 PRACTICUM PROPOSAL

The Practicum was undertaken at Centro Educacional Deocleciano Barbosa de Castro in Jacobina/BA, from September to November in 2014, as a requirement of Letras (Língua Inglesa e Literaturas) course by Universidade do Estado da Bahia (UNEB). It was guided by a project elaborated and developed by me, whose goal was to work with literary texts in order to promote contextualized English classes. The work followed five didactic sequences undertaken within a forty-hour period in two classes of second grade of High School. The meetings were twice a week in the mornings, fifty minutes each. Each class had around thirty or more learners aged between 14 and 16 years.

To the project development, I chose four literary genres and excerpts of four canonical literary texts to illustrate it, namely: 1) short story - *The selfish giant* by Oscar Wild; 2) novel - *Alice's adventures in wonderland* by Lewis Carroll; 3) play - *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare; and 4) poetry - *A child's thought* by Robert L. Stevenson. I chose these ones based on the definitions by Italo Calvino (2007) in his work *Why read the classics*. His seventh definition is coupled with Kramsch (1998) argument that literary text brings different perspectives on culture. Thus, besides the literary text being a powerful representation of the target language, it also serves to illuminate several aspects of culture.

Although Cope; Kalantzis (2009) had pointed out the work with the literary canon is part of the traditional literacy curriculum, it is important to bear in mind that the school have the role of providing systemization of the knowledge socially built by the humanity throughout time (SAVIANI, 2013). Thus, to approximate the learners to these works, I adopted some suggestions presented by the Orientações Curriculares para o Ensino Médio (BRAZIL, 2006) as regards the work with different modes of the text in order to promote (multi)literacy practices. So, I used different hypertexts of these canonical texts, i.e. images, videos, music, and films.

6 THE DIDACTIC SEQUENCES: DISCUSSION AND OTHER METHODOLOGICAL PATHS

The project and all didactic sequences presented an objective in common: promoting reading practices in order to stimulate critical sense in the learners. In other words, my objective were related to the promotion of critical literary literacy. This kind of literacy should be worked by school to present a different dimension of writing social use and to ensure its effective domain, as Cosson (2014) points out. Thus, we can notice that the main objective of the project also presents

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a social function, and therefore, a critical perspective as well as the development of multiliteracy practices promoted by the use of different modes, as presented by the didactic sequences below:

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1) Literary genre

Objectives: Present four literary genres (short story, novel, play, and poetry) and promote learners' autonomy through seminars organization and presentation.

Resources: White boarder, marker pen, and printed texts with genre definitions and literary texts excerpts.

Activities/procedures: Class 01: the learners received printed texts with genre definitions and a literary texts excerpt to illustrate each one.

Class 02: The learners, in groups, presented the seminars.

Evaluation: The seminars organization and presentation.

Source: MATOS, 2014.

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2) Short story

Objectives: Present the work *The selfish giant*; work "simple past" from the literary text narration; and promote learners critical sense and authorship through written production.

Resources: White boarder, marker pen, printed text excerpt, images, and a video.

Activities/procedures: Class 01: It was taught reading strategies.

Class 02: I used some images related to the literary text to forecast the plot of the story. Then, the reading of the beginning of it.

Class 03: We worked with simple past from the literary text narration.

Class 04: I used a video, a literary texts' adaptation, to dialogue with the work. We did not see the whole video in order to develop the next activity.

Class 05: The learners did a written production building their own ends to the story. Then, we saw the denouement of the story represented in the video adaptation.

Evaluation: The written production.

Source: MATOS, 2014.

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3) Novel

Objectives: Present the work *Alice's adventures in wonderland*; work "future will" from a hypertext of the literary work; and promote learners critical sense through (multi)literacy practices.

Resources: White boarder, marker pen, printed text excerpt, images, a music, and a film.

Activities/procedures: Class 01: Listening activity with the music *Alice* by Avril Lavigne and explanation of "future will" through the music sentences.

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Class 02: Literary excerpt reading guided by questions.

Class 03: We saw and discussed the film *Alice in Wonderland* by Tim Burton, focusing on non-sense aspects.

Evaluation: Homework - a written production: The learners should choose at least four characters from the literary work and rewrite their own stories. The productions should include a sentence using the simple past and another one using the future will.

Source: MATOS, 2014.

4) Play

Objectives: Present the work *Romeo and Juliet*; work with Elizabethan theater setup; collate some differences between Elizabethan English and the current English; and promote learners critical sense through (multi)literacy practices.

Resources: White boarder, marker pen, printed text excerpt, images, a music, and a film.

Activities/procedures: Class 01: I explained the format "play" and the Elizabethan theater setup through images.

Class 02: I pointed out some differences between Elizabethan English and the current English and we discussed about the raise of the language. Also, we did a listening activity with the music *Love Story* by Taylor Swift (a Romeo and Juliet hypertext).

Class 03: We saw some scenes of the film adaptation *Romeo and Juliet* (1996) and discussed how technology influenced in the adaptation, for instance, the substitution of a dagger to a gun that kill Juliet in the end of the work.

Evaluation: The participation in the proposed activities.

Source: MATOS, 2014.

5) Poetry

Objectives: Present the poem *A child's thought*; promote learners critical sense through (multi)literacy practices; and instigate the learners' capacity of meaning-making in English and creativity through the proposed activities.

Resources: sheets of printed poem; cardboards, glue, crayons, and colored pens.

Activities/procedures: Class 01: the learners received the poem sentences shuffled and they should organize them in order to make meaning. Then, they should illustrate the poem.

Evaluation: The learners capacity of meaning-making in English and creativity expressed in the posters.

Source: MATOS, 2014.

The objectives were partially reached in function of a series of difficulties related to English teaching. The main problems I faced were: overcrowded classroom, short time of the classes, and learners' participation. The most part of the learners did not take part in the activities under the argument that they had already achieved the passing grade required by school. Besides, the project development was hindered by learners' low level of English. They felt demotivated facing the English texts and requested for translations. Before that, we can note an array of questions related to English teaching in Brazil that goes beyond these that I have mentioned here.

I should discuss the literary texts more historically, socially, and culturally. Thus, I suggest the work with some other authors in literature that present strongly in their works the possibility of establishing connections with social issues, namely, to work with short story: Hemingway and Alice Walker; Novel: Jane Austen and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; Play: Oscar Wild; and Poetry: Elisabeth Bishop. However, it is important to consider the problems mentioned above that should hinder the development of this proposal as well.

In relation to the use of different modes, I was concerned with the promotion of contextualized classes, using resources nearer of learners' reality. Even though I was not aware of the social and cultural functions of these resources for meaning making, I intended to work with them in order to approximate the learners to the literary texts by these different modes, bearing mind the use of texts[2] that the learners are more familiar with. However, in the most of the activities, the relation between writing and image was unequal, being this last one subordinate to the written text. In order words, the images were used in function of the written texts (BEZEMER & KRESS, 2009). Although I had not used the image to add meaning to the text, all images were used to forecast what the written text was about.

Concerning the poem activity, I was careful to do not 'pedagogize' (BEZEMER & KRESS, 2009; DALVI, 2013) the literary text. So, I avoided to contextualize it or add layers of meaning to it, allowing that this was done by the own learners. Different from the *Alice's adventures in wonderland* excerpt reading whereby I guided it through questions and I used a linear ordering of the text to control users' reading paths.

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[2] "By 'text' we mean the material form in which rhetorical purposes and the processes of design are given realization through the modes and modal resources available to the designer." (BEZEMER; KRESS, 2009, p. 250)

Other methodological paths:

➢ Show an image related to the literary text, ask the learners to write a story about it, and then, present the literary text in order to compare the differences and similarities between the original text and the learners' productions.

➢ In order to work with the four literary genres: Ask the learners for images. Each one should take an image. After that, in four groups, the learners should compare their images and write a text (a play, a poem, a short story, and a novel) based on them. The group responsible for novel should do only the structure of it, e.g. the name and the features of the characters, the chapter names, the plot, and the setting where the plot takes place.

➢ After *Alice's adventures in wonderland* reading, the learners should mention other works that are related to this one as well as point out similarities between the worked literary text and others that they already know. The similarities can be related to the genre, the plot, the setting or the characters. Thereby, the teacher can work elements of fiction as the same time as can activate learners' repertoires.

➢ Ask the learners to write ten words that they use to listen in their day-by-day. After that, they should check these words in English and write a poem.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The activities developed in the Practicum presented a social function, and therefore, a critical perspective. The promotion of multiliteracy practices proposed by the project and the didactic sequences enabled learners' critical formation. However, we can notice some remnants of a Traditional Pedagogy, i.e. the way of evaluation is still centered on learners and the discussions are still centered on teacher and on what is considered meaningful. Besides, the discussion proposed by the literary texts chosen should present a more social relevance.

The main problem faced as an English teacher is to propose activities that be meaningful for learners. They claim that English classes are boring, monotonous, and so on. English is seen as an insignificant subject at school and any other subjects seem to dialogue with it, especially when worked by practitioners. During my Practicum experience I felt isolated in the scholar environment, without possibility of establish dialogues with other teachers. I did not have follow-up of an in-service teacher at school and the guidelines for Practicum just present technical information.

An alternative to build on effective educational critical practices is to approximate the discourses and practices between university and school. Also, this last one needs to develop the interdisciplinarity of the methodological work in order to make meaning for learners. Continuing a work development whereby the subject matters are fragmented will not enable knowledge appropriation. What has been worked by each teacher in each subject needs to agree with a main goal: the emancipation and critical formation of the subjects involved in the process of teaching and learning.

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Título

Formação Crítica no Ensino de Inglês: reflexões sobre estágio.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta a análise de cinco sequências didáticas desenvolvidas no Estágio – durante o curso de Letras (Língua Inglesa e Literaturas) na Universidade do Estado da Bahia (UNEB) em 2014 – numa perspectiva crítica, a fim de refletir como as atividades propostas contribuíram para a formação crítica dos alunos, assim como sugiro outras saídas metodológicas para o ensino de inglês. Desse modo, esta é uma pesquisa bibliográfica na qual eu uso categorias teóricas de autores da Educação e da Linguística. É também uma pesquisa documental na qual promovi tratamento analítico às sequências didáticas, embasada no aporte teórico. Os resultados apontam que: 1) as atividades desenvolvidas no Estágio apresentam uma função social e, portanto, uma perspectiva crítica. No entanto, há resquícios da Pedagogia Tradicional; 2) os professores de inglês têm dificuldades em propor atividades significativas para os alunos; 3) é importante aproximar os discursos e práticas entre universidade e escola a fim de efetivar práticas educacionais críticas.

Palavras-chave

Ensino de inglês; formação crítica; estágio.