

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE FOSTERING PEACE: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CRITICAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Building on Morgan and Vandrick's arguments that second-language classes are particularly rich sites to explore diverse notions of the common good and implications for peace and war (Morgan & Vandrick, 2009), this article concentrates on a theoretical study on three key concepts to be discussed in contemporary society: language, culture and peace. These concepts are problematized in the light of critical education by Freire (1996, 1999, 2009). In the first moment, I discuss the concept of language within the perspectives of materiality, cognition and socializing. Then, I problematize the concept of culture and connect it to language. The third part concentrates on the definitions of peace. I conclude by defending that foreign language education should articulate these three concepts in classes, aiming at developing a critique of how contemporary society has appropriated them.

KEYWORDS: critical education, language, culture, peace.

LÍNGUA E CULTURA PROMOVENDO A PAZ: AS CONTRIBUIÇÕES DA EDUCAÇÃO CRÍTICA

RESUMO

No entendimento de Morgan e Vandrick (2009), as aulas de L2 ou de línguas estrangeiras podem ser particularmente enriquecedoras no que diz respeito às discussões sobre o que se entende por bem comum e suas implicações para a paz e a guerra. Este artigo se concentra num estudo teórico de três conceitos-chave a serem discutidos contemporaneamente: língua, cultura e paz. Estes são problematizados à luz das teorias da educação crítica de Freire (1996, 1999, 2009). Num primeiro momento, discuto o conceito de língua sob os prismas da materialidade, cognição e socialização. No segundo momento, problematizo o conceito de cultura conectando-a com as questões de língua e linguagem. A terceira parte se concentra nas definições de paz. Ao final, defendo que o ensino línguas estrangeiras deveria articular esses três conceitos nas aulas, buscando incentivar uma visão crítica sobre como a sociedade contemporânea vem se apropriando dos mesmos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: educação crítica, língua, cultura, paz.

LENGUA Y CULTURA FOMENTANDO LA PAZ: LAS CONTRIBUCIONES DE LA EDUCACIÓN CRÍTICA

RESUMEN

Según Morgan y Vandrick (2009), las clases de L2 o de lenguas extranjeras pueden ser particularmente enriquecedoras con respecto a las discusiones sobre lo que se entiende por bien común y sus implicaciones para la paz y la guerra. Este artículo se centra en un estudio teórico de tres conceptos clave a ser debatidos contemporáneamente: lengua, cultura y paz. Estos son problematizados a la luz de las teorías de la educación crítica de Freire (1996, 1999, 2009). En un primer momento, se discute el concepto de lengua bajo el prisma de la materialidad, la cognición y la socialización. En el segundo momento, se analiza el concepto de cultura y su conexión con las cuestiones de lengua y lenguaje. La tercera parte se centra en las definiciones de paz. Al final, se argumenta que la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras debería articular estos tres conceptos en las clases, tratando de incentivar una visión crítica de como la sociedad contemporánea viene apropiándose de ellos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: educación crítica, lengua, cultura, paz.

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INTRODUCTION: CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND CRITIQUE

Resistance involves deconstructing what passes for culture, discovering the contradictions in the dominant culture, and developing the liberatory traditions of marginalized communities to tap their oppositional potential

A. Suresh Canagarajah, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*

This article focuses on a theoretical study of three key concepts of contemporary society: language, culture and peace. I intend to connect and problematize these concepts in the light of critical education theories. I envisage that this article will be read by academics in the area (deans, coordinators, and professors from Faculdade de Tecnologia, among others) and by our students. To start, I would like to discuss my locus of enunciation so to speak the “place” where I position myself in relation to the theories presented here: I am an educator who believes critical thinking should be present in English classes. I also believe in the Critical Pedagogy (henceforth CP) initiated by Paulo Freire. The CP movement critiques a very conventional and traditional pedagogy based on repetition, copy, and authority. Freire (1996, 1999, 2009) stated that we need to change our literacy practices (práticas de alfabetização) because they do not make our students “think” or reflect upon their learning or upon their lives. In this kind of traditional pedagogy (or literacy), students are only invited to memorize the contents and to repeat everything that teacher or the books say. The students are like robots, repeating everything, like machines. In the words of Freire (1996), “there is a lack of critique in educational contexts” (p. 61). This process is what Freire called the banking education (educação bancária), where the students are “banks to be deposited with “knowledge” by the teachers. According to the author, “they (students) call themselves ignorant and say the teacher is the one who has knowledge and to whom they should listen. The criteria of knowledge is imposed upon them are the conventional ones” (p. 45). I believe that the problem with this kind of education is that it creates – in a larger framework – a mass of students who do not or cannot actively participate in society: they do not question, they do not protest, they do not engage, they do not critique, they only accept reality and do not want to change it.

The theories of Paulo Freire have been discussed and applied for more than four decades. They have been used by MacLaren (1997) and Giroux (2009) in the United States; ,by Luke and

Freebody (1997) and Snyder (2007, 2008) in Australia; and by Monte Mór (2007) and Menezes de Souza (2007, 2008) in Brazil. Moreover, the freirean method (Método Paulo Freire) and Paulo Freire's ideas are spread all over the world. They have reached countries like Chile, Canada, Switzerland, Mexico, Bolivia, Spain, Holland, Sweden, Portugal, Iran, United States, Scotland, France, Belgium, Italy, England, El Salvador, Venezuela, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, Equador, Colombia, Panama, Cuba, Haiti, Barbados, Granada, Austria, Greece, Poland, Denmark, Angola, Norway, Germany, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, India, Japan, New Zealand, Fiji, Australia, among others (GADOTTI, 1996, ps. 48-57). CP has been the basis for many other important educational movements around the world: Critical Literacies, New Literacies, Multiliteracies, Critical Sociolinguistics. The Language Education and Foreign language education have also used Freire's theories. In relation to English language teaching and learning, I believe that CP is extremely important because it invites our students and teachers to think critically, to think through the language, to think about identities, and to discuss culture and multi-cultures. So, how can we see language, culture and peace in the light of CP? Another important question would inquire in which ways can language and culture foster peace.

ON DEFINING LANGUAGE

Language can be viewed as cognitive, material, or social; it is, of course all of those things a tone and the same time.

Gee & Hayes, *Language and learning in the digital age*.

There many ways in which we can see language. Firstly, in Portuguese we have two words to describe the term: *língua* e *linguagem*. The first one is a set of rules (grammar, structures, sounds) in which the human beings use to communicate. Language - in this sense - is material. The second one may be the language that is inside our heads, our mental processes. In English, we use the term language for both meanings. Here, I see language happening in three domains: mental, material, and social (GEE & HAYES, 2011). Thus, it is a set of social conventions, shared by a group of people, about how to communicate (DURANTI cited in GEE & HAYES, 2011). When we are immersed in a language it rather is difficult to understand how it is constructed. For example we can say that a large number of Brazilians learn only Portuguese for many years. In this context, we may not realize how interesting and complex it is to learn a language such as Portuguese. However, with the advent of

technology such as the virtual world, the internet, and the communication devices, it is almost impossible not to realize we are influenced by many languages: English, Spanish, French, Italian, German, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Greek, all these languages are present in our daily streets lives, in mass media, and in business, at least for those who live in the Brazilian capitals. English – for obvious reasons - has been the most important foreign language for us Brazilians. It is the language of globalization and is required for job positions. It is also the language of the internet. Many people have emphasized that you have to know English and other languages (Spanish or French for instance) if you want to “succeed” or if you want to find a good job in Brazil. I would like to problematize this discourse because I agree that English is extremely important, however understanding the ways in which we learn it and “what we do with it” are also very important.

For that, I would like to discuss two aspects about languages (in general) and language learning (English). The first one relates to what we mean by knowing a language (or foreign language) and the second one relates to how we learn languages. Hence, what do we mean by knowing a language? If we think about the pedagogies I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the traditional pedagogy (critiqued by Freire) will state that knowing a language is knowing its structure (grammar), knowing how to write and knowing the standard (“good”) pronunciation of that language. I argue that the problem with this view is that when we consider language as a set of grammatical rules and only, it becomes a set of correct rules to be memorized and “learned”. This also means that these rules can be controlled by some people - the elite, the linguists and the academics - who will determine the correct or standard language. For example, in Brazil the “accepted/ correct Portuguese” is the one from *Academia Brasileira de Letras*. So, if you want to pass the university entrance exams (*vestibular*), go for a job interview or talk to your teachers, you will have to speak the standard Portuguese. However, is there only ONE correct Portuguese? We will see that language in this ONE-vision can bring many problems: linguistic racism, for example, when the Portuguese spoken by the people from the Northeast region or the *Nordestinos* is considered “not good” or “not perfect”; social discrimination when a person does not get a job because he or she speaks Portuguese with North accent (“*português com sotaque*”). I am not defending that we should put the “official” Portuguese aside and speak the way we want. What I am suggesting is that we should explore our concepts of what is “correct” and what is wrong when we talk about the Portuguese language. We should also consider the contexts in which language is used.

On the other hand, the CP education will show that there are many varieties inside the same language, and more importantly, it will recognize that all of them function in each context. It will also recognize that some language varieties are more valued than others depending on the context. For example, a CP practice would discuss (with teachers and students) the reasons why standard

Portuguese is accepted in schools or for them to get a job. By the same token, it would discuss the varieties and accents and show Nordeste students that they indeed speak Portuguese with an accent (a Portuguese that is different from the elite). CP practice opens spaces for discussions about linguistic racism and prejudice. Instead of affirming that there is one correct version of the language (and trying to eliminate the difference), CP practice would invite students to think critically about their own languages (the many languages each assumes in different situations).

The second aspect I would like to talk about is the learning of languages. When it comes to learning English, for example, we see very similar situations: the traditional pedagogy will focus on grammar, structure, repetition, and memorization (and only). There are many problems with this pedagogical practice. The first one is that students feel like repeating robots and often times start to hate the English language. They feel they are not learning and all those exercises of repetition, grammar rules and vocabulary lists help very little. They will forget all these rules and endless lists of vocabulary as soon as they get back home. We should also highlight that this kind of pedagogy is very distant from young students' practices. Nowadays, there are thousands of interesting English courses on the internet. Our students surf on the internet for many hours a week, play video games, watch TV, go to the cinema, download songs, use their mobile phones to text their friends. They use their cell phones practically all the time and when they get into the English class: back to the copybook, back to the "dull" English book, back to "copy from the blackboard". The CP, on the other hand, will try to connect the traditional pedagogy and the new pedagogies. This means that teacher will teach the grammar, the vocabulary, the book, etc, at the same time the teacher will also teach relevant expressions, using songs, movies, videos, "cool" sites, social media sites, etc. The teacher and students will discuss relevant issues and will analyze these issues. I believe English learning and teaching becomes more effective and more meaningful to our students if the teachers practice the CP.

SOME PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURE

We are social and cultural creatures through and through. Which is to say that we are both defined by and defining of the times in which we live.

Mark Kingwell, *The World we want*.

The rise of a scientific concept of culture amounted to, or at least connected with, the overthrow of the view of the human nature dominant in the Enlightenment – a view that, whatever else may be said or against it, was both clear and simple (...) the attempt to clarify it, to reconstruct an intelligible account of what man is, has underlain scientific thinking about culture ever since.

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*

When we think about culture, what comes to our mind? We tend to think about the culture of the peoples, the indigenous culture, the Brazilian culture, the American culture, the French culture, and so on. Clifford Geertz (1973) critiqued this simplified concept of culture where it can be seen as nationalism. According to him, the man is in fact formed in varied ways: through biological, psychological, social and cultural relations (GEERTZ, 1973, p. 37). The author affirms that culture is a complex concept and that - more important than trying to define culture - is understanding its impact on the human beings. Still in the words of Geertz, becoming human means being a social being. This means that we cannot be separated from our culture (or cultures). Hall (1977) participates in the debate and states that culture can be understood as identity construction, an identity that is – in contemporary times – not fixed, fluid, liquid. I believe that culture can also be seen in traditional ways and through critical eyes. Each vision of culture will bring consequences to our students' education, also to society. For example, culture as a representation of the Nation states can be a very dangerous concept. Let us try to answer these questions: What comes to our mind when we think of French culture? *Souvenirs*, Paris, *la musique*, *le cinema*, the romantic French language. Are these aspects positive or negative? Now, when we think about the Iraqi culture (or the Arabs, Afghans, the Pakistani), what comes to our minds? War, fight, bombs, death, suicide men, ugly Arabic language. Are these positive or negative aspects of the Arabic world? Obviously not every French person is romantic or “cult” just like not every Iraqi is a terrorist. And certainly French language may be beautiful to some as well as Arabic may be beautiful to many. We can see very clearly that these two

examples demonstrates how dangerous it is to consider a culture like ONE, especially in times where mass media (television, newspapers, radio, internet) influence and determine our visions of national cultures. Canagajarah (2005) participates in the debate and affirms that the traditional models of education have adopted a single and homogenous orientation in relation to culture. This means that culture can represent a whole nation, like we saw in the examples of France or Iraq. Another example is when we state that “Brazilians are happy people” or when we talk about “the Brazilian way of doing things”. The problem is that this one single vision of culture represents certain interests and erases all the others. For example, when we say that Brazilians are a happy people, do we mean we are happy all the time? That we are still happy when we are doing business or when we are doing serious “things”? Another example is the idea that we always find “an easy way” to do things in order to succeed. Isn’t this a very ironic way of representing ourselves? Does this mean we are all like this? Does this mean that every Brazilian wants to take advantage in all situations? Thus, this vision of culture reinforces stereotypes, sometimes racism, and discrimination.

Critical thinking (the practice connected to CP) defends that “each culture and each community are formed by hybridity”. This means we cannot define someone’s culture as one. How can we see culture from a critical perspective, then? I believe we first have to recognize that each person (or each nation) is formed by varied and different cultures. A person can be defined by its nation, but he or she can also be defined as a man or a woman, also as straight, as homosexual, as transgender. This person can also be defined according to his or her social class or according to his or her educational background. Going back to the examples of the French and the Iraqi cultures, we have to recognize that they are both formed by sub-cultures, multi-cultures, multi-races, multi-languages, social differences, various religions, various places, various histories, various cultures, within the same country, the same state, or even within the same city (such as Paris or Bagdad). This is very clear in France. The movie *Entre les Murs* - for example – shows how complex and challenging it is to educate in a high school in the outskirts of Paris. There are social, racial differences among students and teachers. In the CP view, all these differences have to be taken into account. Moreover, they should be negotiated in classes. Culture is identity, and each one of us is formed by many hybrid and changing identities.

WHAT IS PEACE?

Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to cope with it.

Unknown

Finally, when I think about peace I ask myself what kind of peace, and to whom? If we take different contexts, such as Brazil, Afghan, Iraq, USA, and Africa, what does peace mean to each nation and the individuals of these nations? Or in São Paulo, Sydney, Toronto, Rio de Janeiro, Calcutá, what is peace? Or within the favelas, the condominiums, and the countryside, what would mean “to live in peace”? Or for the spiritualists, the capitalists, the socialists, the Buddhists, what would be the concept of peace? Following my idea of critical thinking, I argue that we have to see what the context is and ask ourselves: What concepts of peace would this place or people think of or desire? In this sense, it is very hard to think about ONE universal concept of peace, where everybody can live happily ever after. I affirm that because “asking for peace” for a person who was born in the middle of violence is completely different from a person who was born in a rich condo. Peace for someone starving in Africa has nothing to do with home or “living in peace”, it has to do with basic survival, with food provenance. Peace in times of violence such as the ones we live in many cities in Brazil becomes such a utopian concept. In the end, I believe that peace should mean: respect for the other human being, for the nature, the planet, the animals. Even being a concept that is hard to generalize, I think each one of us must think what peace is in our neighborhoods, in our schools – and do the best we can to search for it. Another final point I would like to make is that peace does not exist without conflict. I think both peace and conflict must coexist so that we are able to negotiate the different visions and perspectives among human beings. I do my contribution to the search for peace by trying to be an educator that makes my students reflect upon these important concepts such as conflict and peace.

CONCLUSION: ARTICULATIONG THE THREE CONCEPTS

For a peace and justice curriculum, ESL students' social, cultural, and language experiences are key resources and not deficits in need of remediation.

Morgan and Vandrick, *Imagining a Peace Curriculum: what second language education brings to the table*

I started this article affirming that critical pedagogy/ critical thinking are essential to understanding these contemporary concepts. If we consider the tension between traditional pedagogy/traditional thinking versus critical pedagogy/ critical thinking we could produce this differences between them:

Tabela 1: Resumo dos conceitos de língua, cultura e paz

	Traditional pedagogy Traditional thinking	Critical Pedagogy Critical Thinking
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language is static, grammar is the most important - The teacher teaches and knows THE LANGUAGE - The students repeat the language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language is fluid and contextual; grammar, communication, and reflection are all important - The teacher teaches and negotiates the many languages - The students learn and produce language
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culture is static, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culture means

Culture	fixed, MONO-culture	cultures, identities, MULTI-cultures
Peace	- There is one universal concept of peace	- There are many concepts of peace, peace from below, peace and conflict in interplay

I have tried to connect these three key concepts of our contemporary society based on the critical thinking and the critical pedagogy education. I argue that – for us to start re-thinking our roles in society, for us to understand culture, for us claim for peace – we have to move beyond the idea that things are static, fixed and that the world is only one. We are varied, multiple, and diverse. We live – in the words of Bauman – in liquid times, where relationships cannot be petrified. Instead, the relationships should open up spaces for the diversity of languages and cultures. In this sense, I believe that language and culture can redefine the idea of peace, fostering many concepts of peaces around the globe. I conclude with the words of Morgan and Vandrlick (2009), who defend that Foreign Language Education can contribute to a more just and peaceful world, by developing a peace curriculum in schools:

We believe that the reverse is true as well: classes focusing on second-language teaching can be particularly rich sites for the kinds of exchanges that are essential for understanding the concept and dimensions of the common good and its implications for peace and war. Because of the intercultural interactions in such classrooms and the focus on language and communication among differing peoples, second-language educators are in a unique position to develop theories of pedagogy that address interethnic conflict and the dehumanizing language and images that allow and promote it. (MORGAN & VANDRICK, 2009: 511).

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