GENDER, ETHNIC AND CLASS ISSUES IN ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS[1]

GÊNERO, ETNIA E CLASSE EM LIVROS DIDÁTICOS DE INGLÊS

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Abstract: this paper aims at analyzing the work on gender, ethnic and class issues in English textbooks. We have based our analysis on texts which point out the importance of working on aspects of citizenship in elementary levels as a way of helping students develop their social consciousness. We have provided an overview on textbook theory (HARMER, 1998), the emergence of teaching English through social aspects (JANKS, 2014) and the work on the critical gaps of English textbooks (DUBOC, 2017). Furthermore, activities from textbooks written by authors who tend to deal with social issues as well as those which are not intended to do so are analyzed. As a result, it is perceived that the attitudes adopted by teachers are decisive when it comes to providing critical classes.
Keywords: Class. English Teaching. Ethnicity. Gender. Textbook.

Resumo: este artigo tem o objetivo de analisar o trabalho com questões de gênero, etnia e classe em livros didáticos de Inglês. Esta análise foi baseada em obras que apontam a importância em se trabalhar aspectos da cidadania na educação básica como forma de auxiliar estudantes no desenvolvimento de uma consciência social. É apresentada uma visão geral de teorias sobre livros didáticos (HARMER, 1998), a emergência do ensino de Inglês para a cidadania (JANKS, 2014), além do trabalho com as brechas críticas existentes nos livros didáticos (DUBOC, 2017). Além disso, atividades de livros didáticos que foram desenvolvidas e não desenvolvidas para trabalhar com questões sociais são analisadas. Como resultado, percebe-se que as atitudes adotadas pelos professores são decisivas para a promoção de aulas críticas.
Palavras-chave: Classe. Ensino de Inglês. Etnia. Gênero. Livro Didático.

Introduction

Having social aspects as the main topics of a paper demands a different effort from researchers. That effort is symbolized by the necessity of being critical e analytical in a deeper way because, in this case, researchers are somehow part of what they are researching. In the light of an ethical and responsible approach, we have chosen to base our discussions and analyses on the perspectives of the Critical Literacy. According to Janks, "critical literacy work has to pay attention to questions of power, diversity, access and both design and redesign, and to recognize their inter-dependence" (JANKS, 2014, p. 5). By having set our theoretical basis, we should go towards the central focus of our actions concerning Critical Literacies: the English Language teaching.

The History of English teaching has been a journey of changes and development of different points of view. We have witnessed the emergence of many methods, approaches and methodologies for dealing with the teaching of this language. Besides, English teaching has been affected by the positions that language has taken throughout decades in the world. Thus, by taking these points into account, we add one of the most important and common English teaching materials: textbooks. We have experienced different lines of focus when it comes to textbooks. Moreover, we have observed changes in the way textbook activities are designed and produced according to different periods of time.

Firstly, we mention the various roles played by the English Language through many views and purposes. We problematize the impacts of seeing English in different ways: English as a foreign language, as an international language and as lingua franca. We point out that scenarios of learning may be diverse depending on the relationship teachers and students have or develop with English.

Secondly, we discuss the way English teaching has been seen through times and the consequences of those different views on the teachers' management of English lessons. Furthermore, we point out the fact that a methodology does not disappear simply because another one comes to the world scene. Besides, we present the Post-Method Condition and its emphasis on teachers' role and responsibility while choosing the best and more suitable methods and approaches for their reality.

In the following section, we provide some background information on textbook theory. The way teachers see textbooks will impact on the way they deal with them in their classrooms. Textbooks may

be seen or approached as a guide, as a complement or may be omitted by teachers. Moreover, we present a table with different designs of activities according to the ways English Language and English teaching may be dealt.

Finally, we present and discuss examples of textbook activities. First of all, we analyze gender, ethnic and class representation in English textbooks. In order to do so, we take official documents and rewarded authors in the English teaching field into account. Besides, we present ways of working through the gaps of activities which are not properly drawn for social aspects as those already mentioned.

English teaching impacted by different views

The English Language has not been categorized in the same or unique way through History. Depending on the political power and influence of English speaking countries, varied views emerged to define that language. Besides, the way English was used for or approached impacted on the form it was faced by its speakers both native and non-native ones.

Amongst the categories in which English has been defined, we have: English as a second language, as a foreign language, as an international language and as lingua franca[3]. Those expressions represent different views impressed on the language. Certainly, the way teachers approach English is diversified depending on the manner they come to it (BRASIL, 2006).

The understanding of English as an international language, for instance, can make teachers reflect upon the fact they should not use or take specific variations of English into account in order to correct their students. However, we are not dealing with a matter of being better or worse to look at English as a second, a foreign or an international language. Instead of this, it is a matter of getting to know we are offered many possibilities to work with it depending on our purposes and contexts (RAJAGOPALAN in LIMA, 2009). Rajagopalan defends that English is not a language of a nation anymore. It has gotten disseminated and reached the status of a "world language":

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[3] This part of the paper was not designed for defining categories and conceptions of language. Our purpose was to contextualize the English Language and its various movements without necessarily providing definitions.

> Consider the following argument: a language such as English can only be claimed to have attained an international status to the very extent it has ceased to be national, i.e., the exclusive property of this or that nation in particular (Widdowson). In other words, the U.K. or the U.S.A. or whosoever cannot have it both ways. If they do concede that English is today a world language, then it only behooves them to also recognize that it is not their exclusive property, as painful as this might indeed turn out to be (RAJAGOPALAN, 2009, p. 100).

After this contextualization, it is possible to mention that English is characterized by diverse lines. Thus, in the light of this argument, we can conclude that the way teachers see language might interfere in the way they deal with social issues as gender, ethnicity and class. If teachers look at English by taking cultural aspects into account and providing ways to break stereotypes, they work on it by helping students in the development of diverse and critical analysis (NIETO, 2010).

English language through periods of time

The teaching of English has taken different directions throughout decades. From periods of methods to post-method, we have seen many miraculous suggestions and programs through which English teaching and learning would be facilitated. No matter how spread methods or approaches were, they would always serve the interests of someone or a general group. Moreover, previous methods did not disappear simply because others started being developed and used. It would always be a case of social and political contexts.

One of the first rewarded methods was the Grammar-Translation Method. This program of teaching was based on studying isolated grammar topics via translation and elaboration of sentences. As Larsen-Freeman and Anderson say, the Grammar-Translation Method was classified as the classical way to teach a language. This label came from the fact that language used to be primarily taught through literature. We can identify this classical aspect in those authors' words:

> The Grammar-Translation Method is not new. It has had different names, but it has been used by language teachers for many years. At one time it was called the Classical Method since it was first used in the teaching of the classical languages, Latin and Greek. Earlier in the 20th century, this method was

> used for the purpose of helping students to read and appreciate foreign language literature. It was also hoped that through the study of the target language students would become more familiar with the grammar of their native language and that this familiarity would help them speak and write their native language better (LARSEN-FREEMAN & ANDERSON, 2011, p. 32).

Following the decades, we have the advent of the Audio-lingual Method. This method was characterized by non-contextualized lessons and the practice of drills. Repetition was a key feature for those who originally followed this method because "learning a language, it was assumed, entails mastering the elements or building blocks of the language and learning the rules by which these elements are combined" (RICHARDS & RODGERS, 1999, p. 49). As time went by, "the communicative approach in language teaching starts from a theory of language as communication. The goal of language teaching is to develop what Hymes (1972) referred to as communicative competence" (RICHARDS & RODGERS, 1999, p. 69). In this approach, teachers are not closed into fixed steps once an approach is wider than a method. On the other hand, we still witness guidelines through which the teaching should be driven in order to make the best of it. Differently from the previous methods, the Communicative Approach offered space for making mistakes and learning by trying and finding different ways of communicating.

Even though many methods and approaches appeared to offer the magical key for learning English, some teachers realized they were not connected with their classrooms. In general, a method is characterized as being a closed model, that is, a standard path through which teachers should base their lessons on. However, realities and students are varied and multifaceted. They have different needs, backgrounds and conceptions concerning the English language. Kumaravadivelu explains some reasons for such a disillusion towards methods throughout decades:

> We thought we should be able to find that one magical method through objective analysis. Instead, we found out to our dismay that the formation and implementation of a method have to take into account many variables (such as language policy and planning, learning needs, wants and situations, learner variations, teacher profiles, etc.) most of

which cannot be controlled for a systematic study (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2008, p. 164).

Finally, we are presented to the Post-Method Pedagogy. Kumaravadivelu (2008) mentions that following the Post-Method line means being in a Post-Method Condition. Then, according to this line of thinking, teachers are the ones responsible for analyzing and choosing the best ways for leading their classes and the aspects of each method or approach that might be connected to their classroom realities. Beyond this, teachers may choose not to follow any method or approach.

English textbook theory

There are many ways through which textbooks may be used. However, the way each teacher sees the textbooks they work with will have impact on the form they deal with subjects and the management of the classrooms they are inserted in. At the end of the last century, for instance, Harmer mentioned that "using textbooks creatively is one of the premier teaching skills" (HARMER, 1998, p. 112). This author says that textbooks may be approached in three distinct ways: they may be seen as the center of the lessons, as an auxiliary during the teaching or they may be omitted by the teacher.

When teachers understand textbooks as the center of a lesson, they normally do not analyze or criticize any of the points approached in them. Thus, they do not see any need for changing or adding anything to the activities. By having this attitude towards textbooks, teachers end up getting jailed inside the walls of the authors' intention and, consequently, miss on the opportunity of creating a scenario of critical analysis for both students and them.

On the other hand, when teachers look at textbooks as auxiliaries of their lessons, they realize they can take advantage of the benefits provided by them. However, they build a setting for changing activities and adding points according to each context of teaching. They do not deny the pros of the materials they deal with, but they are open for analyzing possible arrangements or omissions which they see as necessary.

Lastly, textbooks may be omitted by English teachers for so many reasons. Within those reasons, we have the statement that the book is not linked to students' reality. Moreover, some teachers mention that textbooks are not designed for the level their students are in. Furthermore, some educators may state that they do not feel like following the sequences

offered by the authors. Harmer defends the choice of omitting textbooks or lessons from a textbook but he suggests that this posture should be conscious:

> There's nothing wrong with omitting lessons from textbooks. Teachers do it all the time, developing a kind of 'pick and choose' approach to what's in front of them. However, if they omit too many pages, the students may begin to wonder why they are using the book in the first place, especially if they have bought it themselves (HARMER, 1998, p. 111).

By and large, depending on the way teachers organize their relationship with the textbooks available, they can promote and implement different approaches. Moreover, the path taken by each teacher while dealing with textbooks illustrates part of their background in the field of teaching. Taking textbooks as a guide, looking at them as tools or omitting them are results of the way teachers manage their classrooms, organize the course of their lessons and perceive the teaching process itself.

Gender, ethnic and class aspects represented in textbooks

The work on gender, ethnic and class issues has been recent in English textbooks produced in Brazil. We have experienced the emergence of those topics after the implementation of The National Plan of textbooks managed by The Brazilian Ministry of Education. That plan demands some topics that textbook authors have to mention, contextualize and critically explore in textbook activities in order to have their books approved and adopted by Brazilian schools. We have the following picture which shows some of the points demanded by the public notice of The National Plan of textbooks in Brazil:

Picture 1: Some of the items demanded

<**CRITÉRIOS ELIMINATÓRIOS ESPECÍFICOS PARA O COMPONENTE CURRICULAR LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA MODERNA (ESPANHOL E INGLÊS)**>

Segundo orientação explícita do Edital, a equipe de avaliadores analisou as obras inscritas com vistas a verificar se a coleção:

1. Reúne um conjunto de textos representativos das comunidades falantes da língua estrangeira, com temas adequados ao Ensino Médio, que não veicule estereótipos nem preconceitos em relação às culturas estrangeiras envolvidas, nem às nossas próprias em relação a elas;
2. Seleciona textos que favoreçam o acesso à diversidade cultural, social, étnica, etária e de gênero manifestada na língua estrangeira, de modo a garantir a compreensão de que essa diversidade é inerente à constituição de uma língua e a das comunidades que nela se expressam;
3. Contempla variedade de gêneros do discurso, concretizados por meio de linguagem verbal, não verbal ou verbo-visual, caracterizadora de diferentes formas de expressão na língua estrangeira e na língua nacional;
4. Inclui textos que circulam no mundo social, oriundos de diferentes esferas e suportes representativos das comunidades que se manifestam na língua estrangeira;
5. Expõe elementos de contextualização social e histórica dos textos selecionados, de modo que se possa compreender suas condições de produção e circulação;

Source: (BRASIL, 2018, p. 17)

Differently from a recent past when English textbooks were generally intended to deal only with grammar and vocabulary aspects, we have watched the emergence of works linked to social issues lately. Among those issues, we have seen the textbook authors' preoccupation on dealing with gender, ethnic and class points, for instance, not only as a matter of personal choice but because those points are demanded by the Brazilian Ministry of Education. Below, we have the introduction of a unit from a textbook entitled *High up* which was adopted by some Brazilian schools through The National Plan of Textbooks managed by The Brazilian Ministry of Education.

Picture 2: Problematizing social aspects

ARE YOU MORE
HUMAN THAN ME?
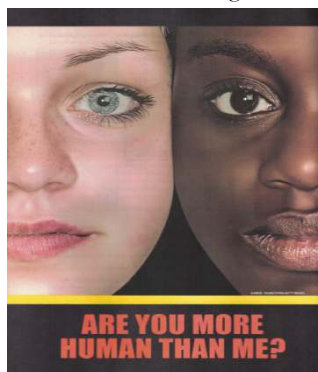
Source: (DIAS; JUCÁ; FARIAS, 2013, p. 124).

One of the complex points while dealing with gender, ethnic and class issues is the danger of spreading stereotypes. Teachers who bring those topics to their students have to be really careful not to develop closed and stereotyped concepts during their classes. Sometimes, teachers have good intentions while dealing with social aspects but they do not analyze their own ideas deeply. It is necessary to criticize our points of view and offer students spaces for opening, breaking and rebuilding social constructions crystallized throughout decades (BRASIL, 2006).

Brazilian official documents for Education recommend that the work with the English Language should be based on varied and open approaches. That said, global and local aspects should be taken into account while planning lessons. Beyond this, it appears to be necessary to consider the links between global and local aspects and what has been called *glocal*, that is, the mutual relation of influence between global and local (BRASIL, 2006). Beyond this, while working on global and local perspectives, teachers should think of a scenario of inclusion which has to be based on wide conceptions:

> We believe that the issue of inclusion should be studied through wide ways and under educational points of view which will lead towards a sensibility that a vision of inclusion is inseparable from a critical consciousness of heterogeneity and socio-cultural and linguistic diversity[4] (BRASIL, 2006, p. 96).

In order to approach gender, ethnic and class issues through effective ways, teachers should bring students' realities to discussion. It is necessary to integrate students' contexts to the issues problematized in English lessons. On the other hand, it is crucial to expand the barriers of local realities and see beyond, as already mentioned in the previous paragraph (FERREIRA, 2014; SILVA, 2007). Teachers should always work on gender, ethnic and class issues through the light of global, local and *glocal* analyses. By offering this kind of approach, educators can provide students with the chance of seeing beyond and building multiple social views. The pictures below represent a fruitful activity through which

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[4] **Original**: "Mas acreditamos que a questão da inclusão deva ser estudada de maneira ampla, de novo, sob um ponto de vista educacional que poderá levar à sensibilidade de que uma visão da inclusão é inseparável de uma consciência crítica da heterogeneidade e da diversidade sociocultural e linguística" (BRASIL, 2006, p. 96).

teachers could critically work on students' social identities, especially gender, ethnic and class ones:

Picture 3: Exploring social identities in the English textbook

Source: Cartoonstock.com

Recent studies have showed that even after the crossing of the Twenty-first Century gender and ethnic representation in textbooks are not disposed to promote equality or social justice. It would be unfair to compare textbook representations with those of decades ago. However, it is crucial to mention that it is still necessary to emphasize gender and ethnic representations in textbooks in the light of diversity. When discussing social representation, teachers deal with a really delicate aspect once "differences in identity and power affect who has the right to speak and act in different situations as well as who gets heard when they do speak or notice when they take action" (JANKS, 2014, p. 5).

Ferreira (2014) has collected some data from English textbooks produced in Brazil. Her study has showed that women are still less represented than men in most textbooks. Furthermore, ethnicities which were almost forgotten in English textbooks are still in the margins of representation. She has elaborated a table showing textbook representation when it comes to gender and ethnicity:

Picture 4: Social representation in English textbooks

Table 1: Representations of white, Asian and black people

Attributes	White	Asian	Black	Total
Man	321 (89,6%)	13 (3,6%)	24 (6,7%)	358 (100%)
Woman	246 (88,1%)	20 (7,1%)	13 (4,6%)	279 (100%)
Total	567 (89%)	33 (5,1%)	37 (5,8%)	637 (100%)

Source: (FERREIRA, 2014, p. 98)[5]

After having illustrated examples of clear approaches towards social issues like gender, ethnicity and class in textbooks, we are now presented to examples of activities which are not intentionally designed for promoting the work on those topics. In the face of this teaching scenario, we have phenomena called by Duboc (2017) as gaps. Having based on Duboc's term, we have chosen to call those phenomena as *critical gaps* in an attempt to keep the original meaning of the expression in Portuguese.

A critical gap could be referred to as an attitude taken by the teacher in order to take advantage of the spaces of non-critical activities with the aim of turning them into critical ones. Thus, teachers should instigate students to analyze which social aspects should be considered in the activities they are dealing with, which elements were hidden, which people are not represented, and so on and so forth (DUBOC in TAKAKI; MACIEL, 2017). That said, Duboc points out the emphasis on the necessary critical analyses of teaching materials which should be implemented by teachers. She defends that "an analysis of English teaching materials may be an interesting exercise for teachers who want to identify why so many aspects of the traditional curriculum as homogeneity, objectivity and stability are still present nowadays"[6] (DUBOC, 2017, p. 213).

Sometimes, depending on teachers' approaches towards textbooks activities, pre-social thought activities become less effective than those in which teachers have to find critical gaps. Furthermore, even

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[5] The original table was elaborated by Ferreira (2014) and published in Portuguese. However, in face of having this paper written in English, we have chosen to adapt and translate the original table into English.

[6] **Original:** "uma análise de materiais didáticos para o ensino de línguas estrangeiras pode ser um interessante exercício ao professor que deseja identificar como essa homogeneidade, objetividade e estabilidade do currículo tradicional ainda está presente em nosso dia a dia escolar (DUBOC, 2017, p. 213).

in the face of critical activities elaborated by rewarded authors, it is still necessary to take in mind that all textbook activities and texts are to be critically analyzed and contextualized.

In the following picture, we are shown an example of activity which might be fruitful for analyses depending on the way it is approached by teachers. At a first glance, this activity seems to be a simple and classical vocabulary based one. However, there might be critical questions through which teachers could achieve fruitful results: does everybody have the chance of getting to know those varieties of flowers? Which people or genders are socially thought for appreciating flowers? Are men socially allowed to show they enjoy flowers? Which classes and ethnicities are represented and hidden in the pictures? These questions should provide students with the chance of developing critical minds (JANKS, 2014).

Picture 5: Working through critical gaps
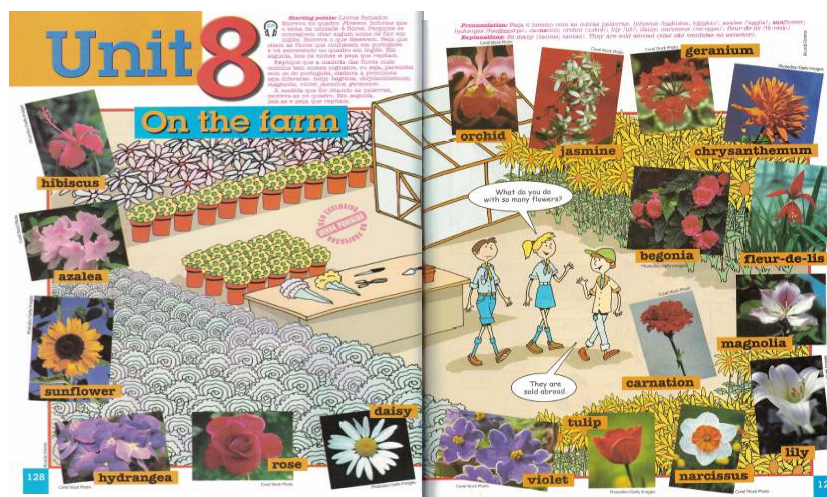
Source: (LIBERATO, 2010, p. 128-129)

Not all teachers are aware of possible critical gaps in the textbooks they work with. In general, those gaps are interchanged among teachers of the same school disciplines. However, sharing moments turn to be really rare or inexistent once many English teachers are the only ones in their jobs. Thus, fruitful moments for sharing experiences and approaches concerning activities could emerge during courses of continuing Education.

> It is not enough to provide schools, teachers and students with electronic devices. Beyond the

> acquisition of computers, for instance, it is crucial to verify how courses of continuing education have been developed and whether teachers are motivate to participate in them or not[7] (BOA SORTE, 2017, p. 126).

Regardless of dealing with pre-designed activities for working on gender, ethnic and class issues or not, teachers have an important role in representing and offering varied ways of seeing and interpreting world aspects. That said, culture is a key term when it comes to analyzing English textbooks. It is crucial to think of it by taking what Nieto (2010) defends into account. She says that "culture is dynamic, multifaceted, embedded in context, influenced by social, economic and political factors". Furthermore, we are told about historical and sociopolitical aspects as important points for analyzing people's conceptions towards many social issues as gender, ethnicity and class:

> The second consideration to be kept in mind is that the sociopolitical context of culture needs to be acknowledged. That is, cultures do not exist in a vacuum, but rather are situated in particular historical, social, political, and economic conditions, and therefore they are influenced by issues of power (NIETO, 2010, p. 136).

Final remarks

Conceptions of language, historical perspectives in the field of English teaching and textbook theory served as basis for approaching social issues in this paper. As central analyses, we had examples of teaching practices based on the theory of Critical Literacies. In order to fortify those analyses, it was argued that The National Plan of Textbooks came to be a certification that social issues should be mentioned and critically approached in schoolbooks adopted in Basic Education in Brazil. By having this program fortified, we are presented to the fact that working on gender, ethnic and class aspects is not a matter of choice but a mission for teachers and authors.

Having been offered the chance of working with social aspects as gender, ethnicity and class in the classroom represents the development

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[7] **Original:** "Apenas equipar escolas, professores e alunos com dispositivos digitais não é o suficiente, é necessário oferecer formação para o acesso crítico aos múltiplos textos. Para além da doação de computadores, por exemplo, deve-se verificar como os cursos de formação são ministrados e se os professores são estimulados a participar deles" (BOA SORTE, 2017, p. 126).

of English teaching as something beyond contents and grammar topics. However, it is interesting to consider that teachers' work is not finished even after the advent of so many technological platforms in which the access to information has been wider. It is crucial for teachers to criticize and analyze their everyday actions as well as to provide students with the opportunity of being critical citizens.

We were presented to two different kinds of activity. The first one was that in which we see clear purposes concerning the work on gender, ethnic and class issues. On the other hand, we were shown activities which were not intended in the same way but that offer to teachers even more critical gaps for problematizing world positions and developing students' social consciousness.

It is still necessary to ask ourselves critical questions and problematize our actions and attitudes in an attempt to develop spaces for reflecting. Teachers are the ones who can provide moments for students to engage in thinking and rethinking their thoughts and social positions. Thus, it is possible for students to become agents of changes and/or reflections in their other social groups.

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