



SEÇÃO ENTREVISTA

CONTINUING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION: a challenge?

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Ana Antônia de Assis-Peterson

1 - I'd like to start the interview by asking you about what issues in the teaching of English in Brazilian public schools you consider most important at present.

There are several issues that are intimately connected with the times in which we are living now. I think teacher education should focus on them very closely. But overall I would say that the great challenge is to prepare teachers for a very uncertain and unpredictable scenario. In a way, this shifts the focus from content teaching to context. And contexts are never the same. They change from place to place, from one period of time to another and from one community to another. And that's true even for teachers who will teach in the same community during their whole life. Therefore teachers have to deal with all the knowledge that students bring to class and which they, teachers, don't necessarily master. And that knowledge is also informed by broader aspects, such as social and cultural diversity and the relationship between the local and the global. So the key point is: how to deal with all that knowledge. There's no formula for that. Following Edwards and Usher, in the book **Globalisation and pedagogy**, I would say that teaching and learning takes place relationally

and is policontextual, since the actors involved belong to several contexts at the same time. That is also important for them to see difference not as an obstacle to be overcome, but as a starting point in itself.

2 - We know that the Federal University of Sergipe is part of the **Projeto Nacional de Formação Continuada de Professores de Inglês** (National Program for the Continuing Education of English Teachers) and that you are the coordinator of it. How is it going and what does this program offer as different from the other teacher courses over the years?

We developed a project from 2010 to 2012 with teachers from public education that was very productive. We collected a lot of data that we are still using and examining. But that was not the main point. The point is that the project involved meetings with these teachers to discuss things related to English teaching in connection with literacy theories and practices. We came to know the context in which these teachers had been operating and we tried to collectively build different ways of teaching English, always in connection with the context in question. There was a lot of exchange.

Now, in my opinion the **National Program** is very important and it has a lot to do with a few things I've said here. First of all, it covers a great part of our country, with members from many different states, therefore different realities. Second, its main focus is the work with literacies. Finally, and most importantly, it doesn't aim at presenting a formula for English teaching, nor does it assume that knowledge is distributed top down from a few 'thinking heads', separating theory from practice. We also took that into account in our local project. What I mean is that knowledge is built collaboratively and performatively, as we walk so to say.

In Sergipe we have also organized three events in the past few years. I and **II SEFELI (Seminário Formação de Professores e Ensino de Língua Inglesa)** in 2011 and 2013 and **Letramentos Transnacionais Brasil-Canadá** in 2012, this one as part of the project **Brazil-Canada Knowledge Exchange**, coordinated by Dr. Diana Brydon, of University of Manitoba, Canada.

At the moment, the members of the team are developing individual projects, but all of them have some relationship with literacies.

3 - In the last decades, scholars who discuss teacher education around the world have emphasized that public school English teachers are not mere consumers of knowledge but they are producers of knowledge. They have also talked about the need of teachers being

reflexive and critical. More recently, we have noticed that scholars who talk about new literacies and new technologies have brought in another term: meaning-making. What does meaning-making mean in the framework of New Literacies? How does a teacher become a meaning-maker? How do we create the conditions for an English teacher to become a meaning-maker?

Well, teachers have to be meaning-makers if they want to connect with their students. The situation has changed quite a lot in recent years. Teachers used to be the holders of knowledge par excellence and that's where their authority would come from. I mean, there was a more or less pre-established set of subjects and contents that teachers would master and then distribute to their students in a rather homogeneous fashion. So, as you mentioned, that doesn't mean that teachers are necessarily producing knowledge. Most of the time, in fact, they were just consumers of knowledge produced elsewhere. And students nowadays have access to a whole range of information by means of the new technologies of communication, as you also mentioned, outperforming in some cases the teachers themselves. And that applies not only to technologies, but English as well. What I mean is that it is quite difficult for teachers to master so much knowledge, we cannot expect students to rely on the knowledge that these teachers bring to the classroom only. So the students are making meaning out of a whole range of situations in their lives, and teachers should be able to do the same. Now, if we want to create conditions for that, we have to focus on teacher education. As I said, teachers nowadays cannot account for everything. That's why I believe that teacher education should prepare teachers to deal with this situation in a way that they could be able to make meaning 'together with' their students and not 'for' them. And this is where critique and reflexivity comes in. If the students bring so much knowledge to the classroom, one of the teachers' roles nowadays is to make these students aware of the social, cultural and political implications of the discourses that they are dealing with.

4 - Your work and writings have pretty much been focused on discourse practices, identity, language and culture regarding the teaching of English and English teachers; however, your doctorate dissertation focused on the **MST**, Brazil's **Landless Workers' Movement**. Why was that so? How does this relate to your current work?

The **MST** is an amazing subject, and there's so much to talk about it! I thought the movement would be a suitable means to discuss very up to the moment issues that are also related to language and culture, such as nationalism, globalization, identity building and the

blurring of boundaries. At a more specific level, I tried to investigate how the movement is making use of English, new media and literacies. I noticed that, in spite of being highly critical of the influence of the United States worldwide and in Brazil, the **MST** makes use of English and the new media to articulate local and global resistance against hegemonic forces. And that may jeopardize its own identity because these tools are usually related to its opponents, especially the U.S.. So it creates some identity conflicts that can be found inside the movement as well since it's made up of people with so many different identities in so many aspects: language, religion, ethnicity, background, and so on.

Recently I started researching electronic games, and I think it is also a very rich subject for discussing a lot of issues in the field of language, culture and education. So, ultimately, I am still interested in investigating these main areas.

Ana Peterson - Thank you. I appreciate your time talking to us.

Vanderlei Zacchi - My pleasure.