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THE DIDACTICS OF PLURILINGUALISM AS A STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL DIALOG IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract: This article aims to present considerations about the development of plurilingual didactics for intercultural English language teaching and learning. From this perspective, our aim is to highlight the relevance of incorporating a plurilingual proposal as an alternative for implementing more diverse and dynamic teaching, which is not locked into a single culture and which understands the relevance of students' prior knowledge and linguistic and cultural differences for the development of students' cultural and communicative competence. In this context, we discuss how the practice and inclusion of this strategy favors linguistic development, the broadening of cultural vision and the expansion of the critical-reflexive awareness of students, who necessarily need to deal with otherness and the nuances of the contemporary world.

Keywords: didactics of plurilingualism; intercultural approach; foreign languages

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, characterized by cultural diversity and the interconnectedness provided by technologies, it is becoming increasingly essential to reflect on the importance of teaching foreign languages. Learning other languages not only facilitates communication between different cultures, but also opens doors to mutual understanding, the exchange of knowledge and the development of relationships of otherness. However, the growing need to adapt to new times requires us to rethink and innovate teaching methodologies in this field. Traditional approaches, which are often limited, no longer fully meet the demands of a dynamic and plural educational scenario. The incorporation of new pedagogical practices, such as plurilingual practice, for example, can transform the way students relate to languages in an intercultural way, making learning more engaging, relevant and effective. Furthermore, it is essential that these innovations promote an education that takes into account the multiple socio-cultural realities of students, enabling them not only to master a language, but also to become global citizens who are more aware and prepared to deal with others, their culture and their differences.

In this article, we propose to discuss and present a brief literature review on the didactics of plurilingualism for teaching and learning the English language. From this perspective, we will show the importance of thinking about the insertion of this plural tool as an alternative for achieving more diverse and dynamic teaching, as well as for promoting meaningful sociocultural experiences for foreign language (FL) students.

PLURILINGUALISM IN FL TEACHING

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), plurilingualism involves a learner's ability to understand and move between languages, thus increasing their linguistic and cultural knowledge through their relationship with other cultures/languages. In this sense, it is also about the ability to develop communicative skills that build bridges between languages, interacting and thus contributing to a more dynamic, diverse, plural and socio-cultural learning experience.

The CEFR defines plurilingual and pluricultural competence (PPC) as the "ability to use languages to communicate in cultural interaction, in which the individual, as a social actor, has proficiency in several languages, at different levels, as well as experience of several cultures" (CEFR, 2001, p.231). In this way, CPP is considered to be the result of each individual's social experiences and takes into account the importance of inserting oneself into different cultures and dialoguing with different languages using one's prior knowledge, which concerns one's own linguistic and cultural repertoire.

Dealing with the didactic aspects of plurilingualism, Souza (2013, p. 22) argues that the plurilingual proposal develops "non-tight mental processes that build communicative skills with the experience of learning languages and how they relate and interact". In this sense, in addition to diversifying the number of languages in focus, which goes beyond English, it expands the learner's contact with diverse cultures that give them the opportunity to broaden their knowledge and develop their critical and intellectual sense. Still in dialogue with Souza (2013), we agree that our society reflects a diversity that is important to consider in language classrooms. Thus, presenting and expanding students' vision of different linguistic and/or cultural contexts is also a way of building spaces that contribute to a better understanding of the other and their otherness, as well as to students' cultural enrichment. Thus:

> Teaching and learning languages must involve a panoramic view of this modern world that recognizes and understands its linguistic and cultural diversity and that awakens in students a motivation to develop communicative and intercomprehension skills, based on their previous knowledge of the language and all the knowledge they have acquired throughout their lives (Souza, 2013, p. 25).

In this sense, we emphasize that by turning our gaze to a plural approach of this nature, we are seeking to contribute to the development of methodological tools aimed at putting this diversity into practice in the classroom. In this way, we can pave the way for the construction of language teaching that, based on the students' own experiences and previous knowledge, can broaden linguistic and cultural contact within the school space through this bridge of openness to plurilingualism. Discussing this issue, Cunha Filho (2018) points out that plurilingual and pluricultural competence brings about a new model and interaction between linguistic and cultural knowledge. According to the author, it focuses on:

in the incessant movements of imbalances and imperfections in this competence, evident mainly in the early stages of learning. It is no longer seen as a perfect and balanced mastery of languages. We have a much more dynamic view of it, as it is better situated and contextualized, since it takes into account its evolution over time according to the circumstances of the subjects (Cunha Filho, 2018, p.22).

We can therefore say that in the school environment, students' intellectual knowledge is also changing in line with changes in the contemporary world. These movements in today's societies need to be included in the school environment, as they have a strong impact on the construction of knowledge of these learners. In this context, life, routine and all the social experiences of individuals are relevant factors when it comes to learning a language/culture. Hall (2014) discusses this role of circumstances and the decentering characteristics of the subject in contemporary times. The author points out that all the transformations and changes in post-modern society, resulting from the development of the globalized world, place individuals in a constant process of construction, the so-called "unfinished subject". Plurilingual competence, therefore, brings with it this dynamism as a starting point for broadening the horizons and evolution of individuals who experience interacting with more than one language and a new culture.

According to Cunha Filho (2018), plurilingualism was initially confused with polyglotism. It's important to bring up the definition of this term, so that we are also aware of its distinctions, because "a plurilingual subject is not always a polyglot" (Cunha Filho, 2018, p. 30). However, a polyglot is a "plurilingual speaker", because he or she has a high level of competence in all the skills of the foreign language in question. Polyglotism, as the aforementioned author points out, relates exclusively to a traditional concept of adding languages to the sub-

ject's linguistic repertoire. These concepts have changed considerably and are now more in line with the idea we are presenting with regard to plurilingual and pluricultural competence, given the advances in research in the field of sociolinguistics, which takes into account the homogeneity of languages and the possibility of access to different linguistic repertoires by speakers of more than one language.

In the teaching and learning of foreign languages, plurilingualism is an important tool for promoting the expansion of linguistic and cultural knowledge, as well as for demystifying prejudices and generating attitudes of respect towards cultures other than our own. In our master's research, for example, we discussed plurilingual education because it "appears as a way of including themes related not only to the issue of linguistic plurality in the classroom, but, above all, as a way of developing learners who are more aware of the cultural pluralism present in our society" (Santos, 2018, p. 22).

For Candelier *et al.* (2013), plural approaches aim to promote plurilingualism as a way of varying activities that take into account global heterogeneity in language learning and contact in opening up sensitivity to other languages and their cultural surroundings. According to the CEFR,

> As an individual's personal experience of their cultural context expands, from the language spoken at home to that of society in general and then to the languages of other peoples (learned at school, university or through direct experience), these languages and cultures are not stored in strictly separate mental compartments; on the contrary, a communicative competence is built up, to which all knowledge and experience of languages contribute and in which languages interrelate and interact. (Qecrl, 2001, p.23)

In this sense, a speaker can use this communicative competence to understand the other person's language effectively, bridging their previous knowledge from their own langua-

ges and experiences to communicate with an unknown language. As a way of illustrating our discussion, in the figure below, for example, we illustrate, as we discussed in our master's research, how this process of mobilizing knowledge occurs in the process of learning and coming into contact with a new language
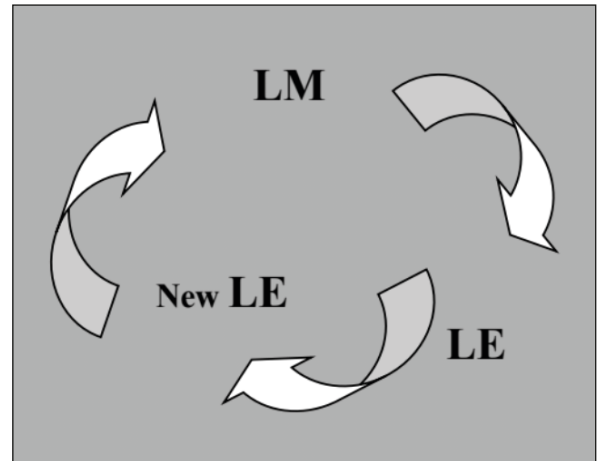

Figure 1: illustration of the mobilization of knowledge from one language to another (Santos, 2018)
Source: Prepared by Santos (2018) for his master's research, adapted from Souza (2013).

Thus, through the mediation of these linguistic experiences, as we see in the figure, and even from gestures and other forms of bodily expressions, communication will be consolidated, which will facilitate understanding even for those who have very elementary skills in other languages, as these are based on their knowledge and experiences in other previously known languages (Degache, 2017).

It is important here to highlight Faraco's thinking (2007, p. 47), when he states that it is crucial to address a "pedagogy that sensitizes children and young people to variation in such a way that we can combat linguistic stigmas, symbolic violence, social and cultural exclusions based on linguistic difference". In other words, this variation to which the author refers also concerns any and all differences, be they linguistic, social and/or cultural, which are important to discuss in contempo-

rary times. In this way, an education that takes into account a plural perspective is crucial for learners to access and expand their knowledge in the globalized society in which we live. We need to show that this cultural, ethnic and racial diversity enriches our country and combats prejudice, as well as awakening empathy among students.

According to Broch (2014), studies that have developed the use of plural approaches have shown results in which students change their attitudes towards other languages and the communities that speak them, thus contributing to improving their performance at school and making them more curious about other cultures and languages in general.

In this way, the characteristic of decompartmentalizing, that is, eliminating barriers, opening paths and doors to acquire new comprehensive linguistic-cultural competences, which combat the precepts of the "compartmentalized vision", as calls it, is the pillar for work that involves such approaches in the classroom. Still for the researcher mentioned above, this plurilingual education "should not be seen as an exception only for school contexts where other languages are spoken in the home, but much more than that, a right of all citizens to have access to the information conveyed in a globalized society (Broch, 2014, p.52).

Authors such as Coelho and Simões (2017) also discuss the importance of including plural education in the school environment, reiterating that it provides discussions that take into account social struggles, against prejudice and discrimination, as well as dialoguing with topics such as bullying at school and other cross-cutting perspectives that are important to address in the classroom with learners.

As a way of destigmatizing a compartmentalized English language teaching in contemporary times, we need to create educational language policies to be developed not only in schools, but also in undergraduate courses,

with teachers in training. In this sense, we can say that the plurilingual proposal is a methodological tool which, as well as contributing to the formation of learners who are more engaged and aware of current social and cultural struggles, encourages students to deal with what is different and to learn more about cultures other than their own, demystifying possible stereotypes and broadening their view of this otherness.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Working with plurilingualism, then, suggests that we, as teachers, rethink ways of developing this interlingual and intercultural practice within the classroom so that we can promote work with activities that dialog with each other and with the plural world we live in. In this sense, Alas Martins (2014) states that, in addition to working with the plurilingual proposal, we need to develop, through intercultural awareness, teaching centered on the acquisition of different types of knowledge as a way of valuing the world's linguistic and cultural diversity so that it can contribute, at the same time, to the cognitive and intellectual formation of the subject- learner. Thus, linguistic and cultural dialog is a key point in working with plural approaches, since they play a relevant role not only in developing students' linguistic skills, but above all in opening up a range of possibilities and ways of recognizing other languages/cultures.

Thus, encouraging and developing contact with this otherness is one of the reasons why we consider it pertinent to carry out studies, activities and educational projects that are based on the practice of plurilingual education, since this also aims to generate and encourage attitudes of mutual respect between cultures and to provide a diverse and enriching school environment when teaching and learning a foreign language.

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