



ENGLISH TEACHING CONCEPTIONS: COGNITIVE PROCESSES ON ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CONCEPÇÕES DE ENSINO DE INGLÊS: PROCESSOS COGNITIVOS EM CONTEXTO DE FORMAÇÃO CONTÍNUA

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Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing the conceptions of language teaching of teachers who participated in the course “*Formação continuada de professores de Inglês como língua adicional*”, offered through the extension grant Program – PIBIX (*Programa Institucional de Bolsas de Extensão*), by the research group “*Letramentos em Inglês: língua, literatura, cultura*” of the Federal University of Sergipe, in 2017, from their perspectives and representations of teaching, didactic materials, teaching practice, and literacies. The qualitative and bibliographic research consisted on collecting data through a written questionnaire, and the analysis was based on Freeman (1998). The theoretical base also includes Kumaravadivelu (2006), Larsen-Freeman (2003), and Jucá (2016). Finally, the data analysis shows that teachers’ answers reflect and reinforce discourses of the inefficacy of language teaching in public schools, which interferes in their teaching practices.

Keywords: Teaching conceptions. Language Teaching. Public school teachers.

Resumo

Este artigo objetiva analisar as concepções de ensino de línguas dos professores participantes do curso “*Formação continuada para professores de Inglês como língua adicional*”, ofertado via programa de extensão – PIBIX (*Programa Institucional de Bolsas de Extensão*), pelo grupo de pesquisa “*Letramentos em Inglês: língua, literatura, cultura*” da Universidade Federal de Sergipe, em 2017, do ponto de vista das suas concepções e prática de ensino, materiais didáticos, fatores emocionais e Letramentos. A pesquisa qualitativa bibliográfica consistiu na coleta e análise de dados baseada em Freeman (1998), além de obras de autores como Kumaravadivelu (2006), Larsen-Freeman (2003), e Jucá (2016). A interpretação dos dados levou-nos a perceber que as respostas dos professores refletem e reforçam discursos de descrença no ensino de línguas nas escolas públicas, e geram consequências em suas práticas de ensino.

Palavras-chave: Concepções de ensino. Ensino de línguas. Professores de escola pública.

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1 Introduction

In Brazil, there is a shortage when it comes to offering ongoing professional development programmes and projects for English teachers. When such initiatives take place, it is by research groups and extension activities in universities. In this context, there are not enough vacancies for those who are interested, or for those who live in cities that are far from downtown and have transportation difficulties.

Brazilian universities' initiatives to offer ongoing professional development to English teachers are not something new. At the end of the 1970's, the English for Specific Purposes National Project (in its original title, Projeto Nacional de Inglês Instrumental), coordinated by Professor Maria Antonieta Alba Celani at PUC-SP, fostered English teacher's formation, teaching materials production, and the founding of a resource center in national purview. The results of the project culminated in the federal government inviting Celani's group to elaborate the Foreign Languages National Curriculum Parameters (Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais de Línguas Estrangeiras), in mid-1990.

In the 2000s, the Professors Walkyria Monte Mór and Lynn Mário Menezes de Souza, in University of Sao Paulo (USP), started the National Project of Literacies "Language, Culture, Education and Technologies (Projeto Nacional de Letramentos "Linguagem, Cultura, Educação e Tecnologias"). This group has a nucleus of research and extension in many Brazilian public universities, aiming at the promotion of ongoing professional development for basic education teachers. Monte Mór and Menezes de Souza were responsible, in 2006, for the elaboration of the foreign languages Curriculum Orientations for High School (OCEM). The Federal University of Sergipe (UFS) is one of the nuclei of ongoing formation for the National Project of Literacies. Its theoretical basis (FREIRE, 1987, 1996; JANKS, 2014; MONTE MÓR, 2013) is

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directed at the formation of critical literacy among teachers and students, and understands language as a political force, considering the power relations embedded in it. Because every discourse is permeated by ideologies, the “doubt exercise” should be practiced, specially in the educational environment, because it generates crisis and destabilizes certainties in many forms of perceiving the world, giving space to the construction of criticism. The Sergipe nucleus is entitled “*Letramentos em Inglês: língua, literatura, cultura*”, and its participants include eight professors of the Foreign Languages Department, as well as undergraduate and graduate students.

Among the activities provided by the Sergipe nucleus in 2017, is the Extension Project, offered through PIBIX (Institutional Programme of Extension Grant) to English language teachers of public state and municipal schools. The activities of the project include offering an extension course entitled “*Formação continuada de professores de Inglês como língua adicional*”, whose main objective is to promote the development of English teachers, specifically the improvement of their professional skills in the English language and in innovative practices in the classroom stemming from the New Literacies perspective.

When thinking about the possibilities of getting to know the results of this professional development course, and rethinking future possibilities of improving the offer of new courses in the Federal University of Sergipe – not only in the English field, it is possible to think about an analysis stemming from the cognitive dimension of the participating teachers. It is a non-observable dimension of teaching in public schools that is related to what teachers know, believe and think about the professional development course in which they are participants (BORG, 2003).

Research that approaches teachers from a cognitive perspective, known as teacher cognition and teacher thinking (FREEMAN; RICHARDS, 1996; BURNS ET AL, 2015; FREEMAN, 2016; BOA SORTE, 2018) focuses on the teachers’ mental



processes and on their perspectives, intentions, representations, reasoning, knowledge, attitudes, and affective dimensions, such as anxiety and insecurity. Such mental processes, inevitably, follow their daily practice, shaping their behavior and their actions. In this case, thought and action are connected in this perspective of a behaviorist vision (MATTOS, 2000; FREEMAN, 2016).

For many years, teachers' cognition was not recognized as part of the teaching-learning process, a reality that is changing. Today, the teacher is recognized as autonomous and as a decision maker regarding teaching. Therefore, many discussions concerning teachers' cognition and the relation between thought and action are taking place in the Education field. Bearing that in mind, this paper aims to analyze the conceptions of language teaching of teachers who participated in the course "*Formação continuada de professores de Inglês como língua adicional*", using their perspectives and representations of teaching, didactic materials, teaching practice, and literacies. For this purpose, data was collected in written form, that is, teachers wrote answers for questions previously elaborated by the researchers. The analysis, in turn, was based on the four steps proposed by Freeman (1998): naming, grouping, finding relationships, and displaying. Therefore, this paper is based on a qualitative and bibliographic research that is based on the works of authors like Freeman (2016), Kumaravadivelu (2006), Larsen-Freeman (2003), and Jucá (2016).

2 Language teaching conceptions

In order to analyze the conceptions concerning language teaching of the public school teachers' who participated in this research, it is necessary, at first, to discuss the four knowledge generations in language teaching, theorized by Freeman (2016): the first generation, aimed to define **what**, and saw teaching knowledge as disciplinary knowledge; second generation defined **how**, and put teaching knowledge as pedagogy; third generation tried to define **who** and **where**, whose idea was that teaching

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knowledge was **in person** and **in place** and; fourth generation, that sought for **why**, and thought of knowledge **for** teaching. The conceptions of language teaching knowledge have been under constant changes that influence classroom practice.

In the first generation, teaching knowledge was interpreted as synonymous with disciplinary knowledge, with emphasis on Linguistics and Psychology. Therefore, knowledge was highly specialized, and it was intrinsically connected to theories from both disciplines. Due to structural Linguistics and behaviorism, language was seen as a worldwide phenomenon, which is why general knowledge theories applied to it. This vision unified the content and learning processes.

When it comes to teachers' cognitive dimension, the teaching-learning process was behavioral, hence teacher's cognition was not considered. Examples of methods from this generation that illustrate its ideas are the direct method and the audiolingual method. However, in the first generation, with the emergence of the innovative methods that addressed the importance of social factors, teachers' cognitive processes started to be considered (FREEMAN, 2016). The first generation was focused on **what**. For this reason, the **how** was not discussed until the second generation.

In the second generation, the definition of teaching knowledge was articulated in "terms of pedagogy" (FREEMAN, 2016, p. 165). Pedagogy, first, referred to the use of a single methodology, but it was reframed as "pedagogical choice" (ibid) among teaching techniques. Teachers should know and decide the **how** that would be better for their classrooms. Because of this, knowledge was seen as individualist, something that, according to Freeman (2016), could result in theoretical anarchy, freedom and teachers' individual agency, or theory could study and explain choices, teachers' agency.

Eclectic teaching – what the author understands as the name given to teachers that, considering their teaching context, combined different activities from various methodologies into one class – raised discussions concerning what would be the best

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methods be. In this context, the postmethod condition emerges. Theorized by authors like Kumaravadivelu (1994), it is defined as an alternative to method in which teachers elaborate theories from their practice in the classroom, in order to practice what they theorized. At this point, teachers' cognitive processes were understood as a "synthetic activity" (FREEMAN, 2016, p. 120) that involved language teachers' decisions about what techniques they should use in order to achieve certain teaching goals.

The discussions on **how** to teach aroused questions concerning **who** makes decisions and how their teaching context (**where**) would shape those choices. The third generation emerged from the focus on these aspects. In the third generation, teacher knowledge was seen as situated **in person** (the teacher) and **in place** (a specific classroom in a specific context). This generation started as a political movement defending teachers' power to choose because teachers were, according to this group, "knowers of their own teaching" (FREEMAN, 2016, p. 170). Complications emerged, however: there was a possibility that teachers' choices would be based only in personal opinions. That was the problem of idiosyncrasy: teachers are singular individuals, with different ways of thinking and choosing pedagogically who teach in multiple contexts. Therefore, finding similarities would be very difficult. At the same time, generalizing could create the problem of exemplification.

In this context, the ideas of personal practical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge emerged. Freeman (2016) states that, they each described teaching as enacting instruction, as dealing with a particular content and classroom, which made knowledge a function of the person of the teacher teaching in a particular place.

Considering that knowledge was held by the teacher and situated in a place, questions about the logic behind the choices made by the teachers arose. In pursuit of answering **why**, the fourth generation gets space on the teachers' cognition discussion, emphasizing the purposes of teaching. Students' learning is explicitly cited as one of

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those purposes. According to this point of view, the teaching process would create opportunities so learning would happen; knowledge, therefore, should be used **in** and **for** teaching, and it was not by teachers themselves. The discussions were focusing on what was necessary for teaching that resulted in effective learning. This means that, in the third generation, teachers' cognition was thought as being a heuristic activity to investigate "the relationships between what happens in the classroom and student learning" (FREEMAN, 2016 p. 120).

Finally, the fourth generation argued that language, in the language teaching field, would be the class content, the means through which this content is considered and, "the professional discourse that conveys the teacher's identity in the world of language teaching." (FREEMAN, 2016, p. 180). But these three uses only align with each other when the teacher is teaching his or her mother language. When we consider teaching English as an additional language, such alignment may not happen.

As a consequence, there are deliberations about the difference between teaching *about* the language – when the classes are developed in the mother language, rather than the target language – and *in* the language – when the teaching-learning process occurs in the target language. The latter would be the most effective, according to research mentioned by Freeman (2016, p. 181), whilst the former would make the target language practice in the classroom seem different from the language used on the real world:

The first two generations were largely focused internally on language teaching, however the third generation, during the late 1980's and early 1990's, was marked by the importation of ideas about teaching knowledge from general education research, which proved to be seminal in many ways. Like the evolution in definitions of thinking, these external ideas helped to define the ways in which language teaching knowledge was understood. And like the ideas about thinking, they were modified – or done differently – as they came into the field. (FREEMAN, 2016, p. 163-164).

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Therefore, initially, with the first generation, the teaching process should happen methodologically, that is, the teacher should adapt one method and be faithful to it. This means that methods were characterized as universal; they supposedly worked in any language class, so teaching contexts were ignored. When the innovative methods were developed, it was argued that the teacher should play a more active role and have autonomy to make choices. Later, with the third generation, teachers' cognition started to be conceptualized as the mental and individual work each teacher makes in their teaching context.

The way teaching knowledge was viewed during the different generations interfered directly in the planning, development, and adoption, by the teachers, of teaching methods, as defined by Larsen-Freeman (2003) as coherent connections between thinking and acting, not formulas. The author analyzes the different methods in her book *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*, with the purpose of providing assistance to teachers in reaching conclusions about how “thought leads to actions” (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2003, p. 187) when it comes to language teaching. One of Larsen-Freeman's conclusion, in this book, is that the implementation of methods varies from one context to another, and most methods seem to approach culture implicitly. In other words, while methods may be decontextualized, classes nevertheless take place in real and specific contexts that involve numerous factors such as geographic location, who the students are, and who the teacher is. Her argument is that methods should be adapted to each particular reality and techniques from methods could be combined to achieve the teaching purpose of the classroom.

Kumaravadivelu (2006), based on Prabhu (1990) and a plenary talk given by the British applied linguist Dick Allwright, in Canada, in 1991, argues against the existence of ideal methods to teaching. He shows their limitations and consequences and, instead, proposes “the death of method”, which leads to the postmethod condition. According to



the author, it provides more autonomy to teachers and, consequently, more self-reflection concerning their teaching practices. In this sense, teachers may theorize from their own practice. Meanwhile, students are active and autonomous agents, with socially constructed experiences, including those lived in the classroom.

It is important to mention that Freeman understands both the postmethod condition and the communicative approach as a set of mixed methodological approaches, methods or/and techniques. The author summarizes the main discussions of the knowledge generations in the table above:

Table 1: Cognition and teachers' role by generation

Generation	Zero Behavioral	One Methodological	Two Synthetic	Three Heuristic
Defined thinking as...	Carrying out teaching behaviors	Working faithfully within a method	Choosing and combining from methods	Considering connections between method and learning
Teacher's role	To perform	To implement	To choose	To investigate
Examples	ALDM	'innovative methods'	Eclectic teaching; CLT	Action and teacher-research

Source: Freeman (2016, p. 145)

3 Research methodology

The data was collected through a questionnaire which was answered by the teachers who work in public schools in Sergipe, and were participants of the course "*Formação continuada para professores de Inglês como língua adicional*", offered through PIBIX by the research group "*Letramentos em Inglês: língua, literatura, cultura*" from the Federal University of Sergipe, in 2017. The teachers participated in the

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research by writing their answers to questions, which were printed and handed to them. The questionnaires included queries about respondents' educational history (elementary school, high school, higher education); whether they have had experiences in other countries; professional experiences; which methods, approaches, style or procedures they use to teach English; what kind of teachers they consider themselves to be; what types of content they teach to their students; if they use the textbook and what their relationship with that type of resource is like; students' level of participation in classes; what the neighborhood where the school is located is like and what students' relationship with it is; how they feel about teaching in public schools; what it means to be a teacher in public schools; how they prepare for their classes; if they have developed classes in the New Literacies perspective and what their experience was like; what the best way of teaching English is; what being a good teacher is; and how they evaluate students.

The participants, all teachers in the elementary school, will be presented in this paper through aliases, in order to protect their identities. The first participant is Lucio, 35 years old. He has been teaching in public schools for five years, and he works 20 hours weekly. He has held a degree in Pedagogy and Portuguese-English for fourteen years, is a specialist in pedagogical coordination, and has traveled to London.

Another interviewee is Carla, 25 years old. She has held a degree in English for seven years, is a specialist in pedagogical coordination and methodology of English language teaching, and has also been a teacher of the public system for five years, working 25 hours per week.

Finally, there is Renan, 29 years old. He has held a degree in Portuguese-English for six years. He is a specialist in education for children and young adults, and he has a master's degree student in English Language Teaching. He has been a public school teacher for five years.

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After the data collection, we conducted an analysis using Freeman's (1998) four steps: naming, grouping, finding relationship and displaying. In the first step, naming, the data are labeled based on three sources: research context, the research itself, or the labels can be created by the researcher.

In this research, the data were labeled with expressions used by the participant teachers on their answers, that is, stemming from the research itself. After that, the codes were grouped in a process that, "involves reassembling the names you are giving to parts of the data by collecting them into categories." (FREEMAN, 1998, p. 99). The categories can originate from the data, *grounded*, or from the exterior, *a priori*. In this research, the categories were created *a priori* by the researchers.

In the next step, finding relationship, deals with looking for previously established categories so that patterns can be found in the last step of the analysis – displaying (FREEMAN, 1998). Therefore, in the research, we sought relationship among the groups created in the grouping step. These relationships included didactic materials, literacies, emotional factors, and teaching conceptions, divided into **how** and **what**.

Parts of the answers given by the teachers who are quoted in this paper were reproduced here in the same form that they were in the questionnaire in order to preserve the fidelity of the data. However, they have been translated to English by the authors, who take full responsibility for the translations in this paper.

4 Data analysis

The collected data will be analyzed here in different categories, namely: emotional factors, New Literacies (henceforth NL), didactic materials, and teaching conceptions that includes the subcategories **how** and **what**.

Emotional factors

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When it comes to the emotional factors category – that is, in the participating teachers’ own words, demotivation, patience, challenge, stress, affectionate students, worry with students learning, fret and worship for the area (English language teaching) – we noticed that the teachers see mastery as a challenge, considering that all of the participating teachers used the term when referring to the profession. To them, the challenge of being a public school teacher is so big that, many times, they find themselves discouraged, as we can see in the following excerpt: “I feel challenged every day due to the problems I find, from the working conditions to the lack of stimulus to professional improvement, and low salaries.” (excerpt of Lucio’s questionnaire). According to this excerpt, many factors may contribute to the teachers’ sense of dejection.

Another challenge pointed out by the all of the teachers is students’ lack of base-knowledge in English. That would be an obstacle to the learning process because it prevents classes that demand students’ production, mostly the oral one (speaking), according to the teachers. One of the participants, Carla, added that some students see the English language as difficult:

Question: What does it mean to be a teacher in public schools?

Answer: A challenge. Besides the lack of a base that most student bring, there is prejudice that many of them have about English being difficult. (excerpt of Carla’s questionnaire).

Regarding the students, some of the teachers stated that they are affectionate and express needing the teacher, in the sense that taking outside English classes is not an opportunity all of them will have. Therefore such students need to learn in the public school, which is the only option available to them.

New Literacies

Emotional factors emerged in the questions about NL. One of the queries

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proposed in the questionnaire referred to the choice of working with the perspective of NL. According to Braga (2013, p. 61), NL refers to the critical use of digital technology, in such a way that “the *wise* person is no longer the *well informed* one, but the one who can build, from a set of diverse pieces of information and means to find them, the knowledge required to solve specific issues”¹. Teaching practices that stem from NL have as one of their goals helping students to “learn how to learn” (p. 63)² in the author’s words, and also promoting “mental operations more sophisticated” (p. 63)³.

When Lucio was questioned about working with NL, he said he had never done it, even though he used slide presentations. Renan, in turn, stated that his experience with such theory in the classroom was “strange. Students think I am teaching another subject. I was even reprimanded!” (excerpt of Renan’s questionnaire). On the other hand, Carla shared that students get more interested when NL is used in the classroom. It is important to mention that the participating teachers are going through a familiarization process with such theory, as they stated in their responses.

It seems that emotional factors like the feeling of being reprimanded, the strangeness, and the interest level of students can contribute to teachers’ decisions to practice the NL theory, or not. Additionally, research participants stated that they need to study the subject more in order to work with it in classes. Another aspect that teachers pointed out as a factor that interfering in the practice of this theory was the didactic materials available in their schools.

The lack of resources in public schools was mentioned frequently, including access to the Internet, which leads to the question: how do you work with NL without digital technology? Is it possible? In Lucio’s answer, he believes that using resources

¹ “*sábio* não é mais aquele que é *bem informado*, mas sim aquele que sabe construir a partir de um conjunto diversificado de informações e meios, os conhecimentos necessários para a resolução de problemas específicos”. (p. 61).

² “aprender a aprender” (p. 63)

³ “operações mentais mais sofisticadas” (p. 63).

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like a projector and a computer does not necessarily mean that he is developing a class based on the NL perspective. He stated that, “in spite of using datashow once in a while, it is not in this perspective [NL]” (excerpt of Lucio’s questionnaire). It is crucial to note, therefore, that it is more about *how* digital technology is used, than *if* it is used. Nevertheless, according to Braga (2013), resources like computers and the Internet are important when working with NL.

Didactic Materials

Now I will discuss didactic materials, starting with the textbook (henceforth referred to as TB). The participating teachers continually mentioned materials. Lucio said he did not use the TB because,

Usually, the TBs that are delivered in the school do not fit students’ reality, the reality of having English classes starting in the sixth grade, with teachers who have no degree in the area. The TBs are all written in English, so students cannot keep track of theme, for this reason, I prefer working on the board. (excerpt of Lucio’s questionnaire).

Lucio seems to wish for a TB that is more in line with students’ realities; he believes that it is not possible for students to use the material if it is all in English. Nevertheless, no book is capable of covering all of the particularities of the various Brazilian contexts. In contrast to Lucio’s statement is Carla’s, which puts the TB as an “indispensable tool” of daily use. Similarly, Renan said that the material is his “best friend, trustful partner”.

According to Jucá (2016, p. 15-16),

The TB is one more resource at teachers’ disposal, and it may be partially or entirely useful, depending on, of course, of the educational realities that the teachers work with every day, of the goals they establish for each one of them and the choices they make in the attempt of accomplishing them. [...] To the



teacher, remains himself as resource. His experiences and knowledge, along his career, inform him and support his perspectives and choices.⁴

While the TB offers many possibilities to the teacher, it is ultimately only a tool that the teacher must be trained to use. Jucá (2016) suggests, therefore, the idea of the teacher as a resource, in the sense that this professional makes choices about what is relevant and important to his or her classroom and those decisions affect students directly.

It is also important to consider the view of self-contained that many people have of the TB and also of other methods. Menezes de Souza (2011) explains the term as a synonym of self-sufficient, in the sense that following a TB or a method is enough for learning to happen, no matter the context. He criticizes the idea, calling attention to the fact that context is important and it cannot be ignored in the classroom, deconstructing the idea that the TB is enough for learning. In conclusion, there is not a perfect TB that fits every context. It is a tool, and the teacher decides how to use it because s/he knows his/her context and classes.

Teaching Conceptions

The last category, teaching conceptions, as it was mentioned in the beginning of this topic, was subdivided in **how**, which was the focus of the second knowledge generation in language teaching, and **what**, which was emphasized in the first generation (FREEMAN, 2016). The former sought to define what to teach and proposed that knowledge was disciplinary. The latter, meanwhile, refers to the questions that evolve how a language should be taught; methods were strengthened in this context.

⁴ O LD apresenta-se como mais um recurso à disposição do professor, podendo ser-lhe útil total ou parcialmente, dependendo, é claro, das realidades educacionais com que trabalha diariamente, dos objetivos que estabeleça para cada uma delas e das escolhas que faça na tentativa de alcançá-los. [...] Ao professor resta ainda a si mesmo como recurso. Suas experiências e seu aprendizado, ao longo de sua carreira, o informam e sustentam suas perspectivas e escolhas.

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Regarding how to teach, Lucio stated that he used games and dynamic activities, such as flashcards and treasure hunts. The adjective “dynamic” was also used by Carla to describe her classes. For all of the three teachers, knowledge seems to be highly disciplinary because the focus is in the structure of the English language. In other words, only the *topic* of the discipline, structure, must be worked on, while social issues, for instance, should be studied only in Sociology. These conceptions are close to the ideas of the first generation. When it comes to “how,” none of the teachers said they use a specific method; in fact, they seem to be looking for answers for the question “how to teach English”. One way of finding these answers is by doing continued education courses. Lucio claimed, in response to the question “what being a good teacher is”, that “it is necessary to be someone who does not see themselves as self-sufficient, but who always looks for professional improvement” (excerpt of Lucio’s questionnaire).

The third knowledge generation emphasized who and where, in a way that the classroom context, students, and teacher were considered (FREEMAN, 1998). The same concern appeared in the teachers’ answers, which highlighted the importance of “being able to adapt to different audiences” and consider “students’ reality”. However, it is relevant to reflect on how these realities are being interpreted and, consequently, how this adaptation occurs. Is it a reality in which students are not able to keep track of the TB in English? Is it about students who cannot learn the language effectively in public schools due to the “late contact” with English, that is, only starting in the sixth grade? One aspect to reflect on is what these readings of teaching realities generate in the educational context; it is important that the teachers do the exercise of “read, reading themselves” (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2011, p. 296).

The teachers all described their classes as “traditional” – for instance, Renan places the idea of “traditional” as “solid ground and safe harbor” – but they do not go

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further into explaining what this word means to them. We believe that they used the word “traditional” referring to the instruction they themselves had as students, and, although they have been in contact with new theories and ideas in the education scope, is still reproduced as a safe place of the teaching practices. In addition, we believe that this idea of “traditional” is similar to Freire’s “banking education” (FREIRE, 1987), in which students receive knowledge from the teacher passively, because one of the participant teachers mentioned that a good teacher is the one who dominates the content of the English language, and that a good student does what the teacher asks.

Once again, the TB was brought up in the teachers’ answers – except by the ones that do not use such didactic material – this time as an indicator of how the content should be developed and of what should be worked on in classes. Along with the content of the TB, teachers pointed out school programs’ content and “contents in evidence in the world” as content that is important to teach.

The participating teachers stated that they believed in the importance of classes aimed at structural rules of the language, that is, “training grammar”, in Renan’s words. Another aspect mentioned was the focus on English for specific purposes: the emphasis on reading and writing as opposed to listening and speaking practices, which are not done in class due to students’ lack of background knowledge in English.

The fourth knowledge generation emphasized why to teach, considering the purpose of teaching. The three teachers recognized the importance of teaching to students’ learning; however, they constantly questioned students’ capacity for developing speaking skills, for instance. It seems that it is not clear to the teachers what their objectives in the teaching career are. When teaching goals are not clear, space is opened to the consolidation of discourses of inefficacy in public education.

The participating teachers mention challenges that cause discouragement, such as the lack of resources and financial stimulus, students’ limited knowledge in English,

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teachers' limited preparation, and unfamiliarity with the new strategies. Such discourses are reinforced many times in the educational environment and build barriers to the teaching-learning process, because the repetition makes them true, naturalizes them.

In the teachers' answers, one idea of students' reality seems to be taken as the truth: students do not have contact with English, therefore, they are not capable of performing activities that involve orality (speaking and listening).

Even though the teachers are connected to the traditional, on their own terms they seem to be thinking about the new discussions in the education field, like taking students' context into consideration. They also showed interest in learning more about NL and in looking for professional improvement opportunities. Teachers' return to the traditional as a safe place, as mentioned, can be due to the contact teachers have with such discourses both as students and teachers.

However, when we think about discourses as socially constructed, it is not possible to think about absolute truths.

It is in this alternative vision of a world in construction, a world that cannot be taken independently of the contexts that interpret it, which cross discourses that build them and are built by them, that do not have an autonomous existence from the existence of the subjects that observe it (MATURANA, 2001), that discourses acquire an outstanding position. They have extreme importance in the perception of different realities, in confrontation of these different perceptions, in the construction of multiple perspectives and complex understandings of the world. [...] The possibility or the desire for "true" discourses is considered illusory when observed from a perspective in which our understandings are constituted in narratives (LYOTARD, 1986), in textualizations socially constructed (JORDÃO, 2007, p. 24-26).⁵

⁵ É nesta visão alternativa de um mundo em construção, um mundo que não pode ser tomado independentemente dos contextos que o interpretam, que atravessam os discursos que o constroem e são por ele construídos, que não têm uma existência autônoma daquela dos sujeitos que o observam (Maturana, 2001), que os discursos adquirem posição de destaque. Eles têm extrema importância na percepção de diferentes realidades, no enfrentamento destas diferentes percepções, na construção de perspectivas múltiplas e entendimentos complexos do mundo. [...] A possibilidade ou o desejo por discursos "verdadeiros" é considerada ilusória quando observada por uma perspectiva em que nossos



The TB both as an indispensable material and as an unusable one is a self-contained tool (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2011) because on the one hand, it can be used in any class and it should be followed completely, and, on the other, there is a certain hope for the right TB that will be compatible with the reality of all students and all classes.

Public schools are said to be a “place where it is impossible to learn English” (BARCELOS, 2011), whilst private language institutes would be the place where it is possible. Renan argued that the public schools follow the model of such private institutions. Nevertheless, according to Jucá (2016, p. 4) based on the OCEM (BRASIL, 2006), regular schools and language courses have different educational aims and objectives when it comes to language teaching. This means that the objectives of public schools are not the same as those of language courses. In the former, the goal goes beyond making students fluent in the target language; the goal is the formation of critical citizens.

5 Further considerations

The ways in which language, teaching, and learning have changed throughout the years have influenced classroom practice. Teachers’ cognitions accompany them in the ways they think about their classes. Given that teachers’ thoughts related to their actions in the classroom, the research of this paper was conducted based on Freeman’s (1998) proposal involving naming, grouping, finding relationships, and displaying. In order to do the analysis, data was divided into four categories: emotional factors, new literacies, didactic materials, and teaching conceptions, each subdivided in how and

entendimentos constituem-se em narrativas (Lyotard, 1986), em textualizações socialmente construídas. (JORDÃO, 2007, p. 24-26).

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what. It was noticed that the teachers were worried about issues that involve teaching and that were considered in the knowledge generations, like “what”, “how”, “who,” and “where.” However, when it comes to the “why” of teaching – the purpose of the fourth generation – the goals of teaching English in public schools do not seem to be clear, which leads teachers to adopt “traditional” practices emphasizing the grammatical structure of the English language, and to the idealization of language courses as preferred places to learn English and as the model to be followed. In this context, the discourses of inefficacy in public education – a place where learning is constrained by various factors indicated by the participant teachers – repeat themselves. The internalization of these discourses interferes in classroom practice, both in terms of what teachers decide to do and in what they decide not to do.

Acknowledgment

We thank Malkie Wall for her constructive comments and feedback on the English version of this paper.

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Recebido em: 06/06/2018

Aceito para publicação em: 28/06/2018