

# *What is this English that We Teach at School? Reflections for the preparation of a teaching proposal for linguistic education in childhood*

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## **Abstract:**

This article aims to promote reflections on the role of the children stories (CS) genre (TONELLI, 2005) and a forwarding proposal concerning the teaching-learning process and the linguistic education in childhood with a view to plurilingualism (PERREGAUX et al, 2003). We return to the concept of children's literature of an emancipatory and authoritarian nature (ZILBERMAN, 2003; ZILBERMAN; MAGALHÃES, 1982) to understand how CS can contribute to this formation. We seek in the British Language Awareness movement (HAWKINS, 1999; JAMES; GARRET, 1993) a theoretical and methodological tool for working with HI in the classroom, to discuss the language taught and linguistic diversity, as well as to promote plurilingualism and openness/awareness of languages (TONELLI; CORDEIRO, 2014). We consider that the CS genre can contribute to child linguistic education regarding the perceptions of the other and of different cultures, raising the level of understanding about oneself and about discursive practices. In this case, the CS and the choice of the literary work has an important place in the organization of teaching, especially with regard to the emancipation of the learner.

## **Keywords:**

Foreign language for children. Children stories. Plurilingualism.

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# What is this English that We Teach at School?

## Reflections for the preparation of a teaching proposal for linguistic education in childhood

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### INTRODUCTION

From the point of view of teaching foreign languages<sup>1</sup> (FL), social exclusion is already implied from its non-mandatory character for the early years of elementary school (ES), since it cannot be guaranteed for all, the exclusion of those who do not have access to it becomes automatic (TONELLI, 2005; ROCHA, 2007; CHAGURI, 2014). In the case of teaching in public schools, there seems to be no federative interest in organizing language implementation initiatives in childhood, nor in offering curricular guidelines (MELLO, 2013; TANACA, 2017; ÁVILA, 2019; MAGIOLO, 2019). Thus, the tension between the supply of FL in the public and private sectors has been addressed by researchers (ROCHA, 2009; GIMENEZ, 2013) who seek to problematize (and denounce) such differences in the teaching of FL.

In order to promote possible reflections for FL teaching practices, this work focuses on the teaching of foreign languages for children (FLC) in public schools, for which there are no curricular guidelines and, although the theme is in growing evidence within the academic territory, we have not yet reached a consensus regarding the epistemologies that can guide this teaching so that it contributes to children in the process of formation. Much has been said about the need to implement FLC in the early years of schooling, as well as the importance of initial and continuing teacher training to act in this context; however, there are still few contributions towards theorizing and implementing principles for its implementation.<sup>2</sup>

It is from this reflection that our questions arise: what is the point of view on language teaching that we intend to develop? How to make these classes meaningful to this context? Can FLC classes help the public school students?<sup>3</sup>

When revisiting the guidelines of the official documents for teaching FL, it is noted that since the National Curriculum Parameters (PCN<sup>4</sup>) (BRASIL, 1998) there is concern with the formation of the student as a critical citizen. However, in 2017, the new document regulating education in Brazil creates new visions for language teaching in Brazil. According to the Common National Curricular Base (BNCC), “learning the English language allows the creation of new forms of student engagement and participation in an increasingly globalized and plural social world” (BRASIL, 2017, p. 241). In this sense, teaching should assume a formative

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<sup>1</sup> We adopted the term foreign language instead of an additional language because the focus of this work is the public school whose guidelines and official documents also use this terminological option.

<sup>2</sup> Tonelli and Cordeiro (2014) advocate the perspective of reflection on languages in activities organized from a didactic sequence. Aligning themselves with the position of these authors, in this work we also consider the Common National Curricular Base (BRASIL, 2017) to propose a linguistic education that also considers social justice.

<sup>3</sup> Obviously, we do not intend here to elaborate a model to be followed; on the contrary, our objective is a theoretical reflection to encourage debate on the topic. We believe that everything that is organized in a collaborative way becomes shared responsibility and, therefore, there are more chances of becoming successful.

<sup>4</sup> The acronym used in this paper is the applied the same way it is in Brazilian Portuguese.

character within a perspective of conscious and critical linguistic education, which brings together the pedagogical and political functions of teaching.

This approximation of functions causes, according to BNCC, a question: “What kind of English is that we teach at school?” (BRASIL, 2017, p. 241). Such questioning was included in the title of this article because it was the starting point for the reflections presented here, because when the Base proposes to ask this question for language teaching in the final years of schooling - which already have consolidated curricular guidelines – should we not inquire about teaching English language (EL) also in the early years?<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, we also consider it necessary to reflect on conceptions of language and teaching when the focus is on childhood, as well as taking into account the context of public schools, the needs of the community served by them and the guidelines expressed in the BNCC on teaching EL to plan our future research and practice actions in the classroom.<sup>6</sup>

Based on the vision and teaching of FL presented by the Curricular Base, we chose the genre children story (CS) (TONELLI, 2005) as a possible organizing axis of the teaching and learning proposal of FLC that we intend. That said, in this text we promote a theoretical discussion on the role played by said genre in the organization of the teaching and learning process in FLC, and we outline a proposal that, in line with the BNCC, is decompartmentalized, with a view to a multilingual education (PERREGAUX *et al.*, 2003; ROCHA, 2009; GARCIA-AZKOAGA; ZABALA, 2015; TONELLI; CORDEIRO, 2015) and the principle of language openness/sensitiveness (TONELLI; CORDEIRO, 2014), as well as the critical and holistic training of the student since the initial years of schooling.

To achieve the proposed objective, we organized the article in five parts. In the first, we seek to understand the process of consolidating FL teaching in Brazil and to discuss how a change in its function has been happening throughout history. Then, in section 2, we relate this modification of paradigms to the implementation of FLC. In section 3, we outline reflections on the principles that will guide our didactic proposal, explaining our motivations regarding the chosen genre, as well as discussing the function of the teaching we intend. Then, we discuss the characteristics that should guide the choice of CS. The fourth part, on the other hand, delves into the concept of plurilingualism and the principle of openness to languages, highlighting its possible implications for the teaching of FLC and how these concepts ought to collaborate in the teaching process of a formative character. In the last section, we summarize all the reflections and present our final considerations.

## **THE ROLE OF ENGLISH TEACHING<sup>7</sup> IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN BRAZIL: A PARADIGM SHIFT**

Brazil is a country marked by inequality and the school is yet another space where social disparities are strongly evident. Public education lacks structures that value teaching and teacher training, or which consider the effects of the detachment with the student and his family, and taking into account the countless scenarios of violence and social vulnerability that many institutions face every day (LEFFA, 1999;

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to highlight that both questions do not refer to the conception of language, in general, but specifically the English language. Our stance on the subject is coupled with the Bakhtinian view of language dialogicity, in which the discourse is polyphonic, ideological and socio-historical and culturally constructed from interactions, never neutral.

<sup>6</sup> The FELICE (CNPq) group is characterized by researches in the field of teacher training and language teaching for children. We highlight the mapping of dissertations and theses that the group has carried out in order to encourage research in the area. These are available at: <https://bit.ly/3iztDZ4>.

<sup>7</sup> In this section, we use the term ‘English language’ instead of ‘foreign language’ because we are using the BNCC text to discuss this paradigm shift. The Curricular Base determines that English must be the foreign language offered in the final years of elementary and high school, starting in 2020 (BNCC, 2017). In the other sections, we again use the term ‘foreign language’ to discuss our proposal.

DRUMMOND; GIMENEZ, 2009; QUEVEDO-CAMARGO; SILVA, 2017; among others). These are some of the common problems for all subjects in the curriculum. But how is the teaching of modern foreign languages (MFL) in our country?

In 2015, a study published by the British Council<sup>8</sup> outlined the profile of teaching English in basic education in the Brazilian public system. The research reports that the role of the English language (EL) in the student's life, from the teachers' point of view, is controversial: 48% of teachers mention somewhat diffuse roles, such as "making them a citizen of the world" and "increase your general culture". Others understand English as a tool for the job market and for college entrance exams. The results corroborate what was exposed by Rajagopalan (2004) about the marketing directions taken by the teaching of English, that is, language learning is conditioned to issues imposed by globalization and the notably capitalist and neoliberal job market. In addition, there is a noted difficulty for teachers to understand the purpose of their work, which, consequently, leads to questions about the role of language teaching in the Brazilian public system. That said, in this section we intend to explore the specifics of the public context, seeking to understand its nuances, as well as the changes that have been happening, and in what direction history and theoretical studies are driving us in relation to this function on which we intend to reflect.

In the words of Leffa (1999, p. 14), "history has shown that a people unable to use the past to predict the future is not only condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past, but doomed to extinction". Then, we will look at the important facts that occurred nationally, in order to understand the paradigm shift that is taking place about language teaching. Thus, observing the framework developed by Quevedo-Camargo e Silva (2017, p. 263), in which a historical panorama of MFL teaching in Brazil is traced, we realize that, as pointed out in Leffa, we have here the modeling of contents and methodologies imported from other countries, with a delay of some years. The classic method or grammar-translation has been adopted since the beginning in the teaching of FL in the country, in 1855. After that, no document, law or reform established a methodological orientation, with the exception of the Reformation Francisco Campos, in 1931, which established the direct method to the development of orality.

In terms of methodological guidance, the grammar-translation method seems to have never ceased to exist, since the direct method did not have the desired effect. The emphasis on the use of (foreign) language for communication and its social character since the end of the 1990s, although it signals an advance in terms of teaching, has not (yet?) had the desired effects, perhaps due to the lack of explicit guidelines in methodological terms. (QUEVEDO-CAMARGO; SILVA, 2017, p. 264).

The silencing in relation to the directions presented in the documents seems to lead to deficient training of teachers who are unable to implement efficient teaching practices (LEFFA, 1999). Drummond and Gimenez (2009, p. 108) complement this concept by saying that "it is necessary to recognize that the training of professionals working in this context has been unsatisfactory. [...] This situation is the result of educational policies that have not yet managed to produce effects for the poorest sections of the population". The authors also denote that although such recognition must be made, it is not fair and/or true to credit all the problems of the public school in the insufficiency of the teacher training process. In this regard, it is important to say that, in this article, our intention is not to look for culprits, but is our intention to demonstrate, through history, that our system has failed to properly and seriously define guidelines and orientations for the teaching, in our case, of English language. Decade after decade we have blindly adopted international models of teaching

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<sup>8</sup> We believe that a more specific look is needed for teaching English in public schools. To this end, we seek to exemplify some of the particularities and challenges encountered in this. The mentioned research is available at: <https://bit.ly/3pEAIzQ>.

approach, from the grammar-translation method to the incorporation of language as a social practice in the MFL's PCN, in 1998, without paying attention to the specifics of the Brazilian context.

As Drummond and Gimenez (2009) suggest, it is possible to hypothesize that a liberating education, conceived according to Freire, may be the key to more satisfactory levels of learning, an education in which the student is not a mere "recipient of actions" (GARCIA, 2011, p. 137); he must (learn to) be an agent in his relationship with the school and the world, transforming the teacher's role from "teaching what he has learned" to "teaching to learn" (DRUMMOND; GIMENEZ, 2009, p. 108).

This way of understanding the role of education, in general, is also endorsed by the most recently sanctioned teaching regulatory document, the new Common National Curricular Base (BNCC), approved in 2017. The BNCC (BRASIL, 2017, p. 7) "is a normative document that defines the organic and progressive set of essential learning that all students must develop throughout the stages and modalities of Basic Education, so that they have their learning and development rights ensured". Rather than being guided by content, it is anchored in competences, "defined as the mobilization of knowledge (concepts and procedures), skills (practical, cognitive and socio-emotional), attitudes and values to solve complex demands of daily life, of full exercise of citizenship and the world of work" (p. 8).

With the mandatory insertion of EL from the sixth year of elementary school, the question that remains is: have we advanced since the PCN in relation to the function of teaching English and the vision of language and language? It is a complex question and that will only be answered in practice, in the future, after its complete implementation. However, from the analysis of its text, it is possible to see the intention of BNCC to try to change the paradigms of EL teaching in the country. The new Curricular Base discusses two concepts that, from our perspective, deserve to be highlighted: 1) English as a lingua franca (ELF); and 2) multiliteracies. The first concept concerns the prioritization of the focus of the social and political function of the language, that is, the objective is to make oneself understood through the EL, which ceases belonging to its native speaker to belong to everyone who uses it.

The treatment of English as a lingua franca detaches it from the notion of belonging to a certain territory and, consequently, to typical cultures of specific communities, legitimizing the uses of the English language in their local contexts. This understanding favors a linguistic education focused on interculturality, that is, for the recognition of (and respect for) differences, and for the understanding of how they are produced in the different social practices of language, which favors critical reflection on different ways of seeing and analyzing the world, the other (s) and yourself (BRASIL, 2017, p. 241).

Understanding that English can no longer be seen as a foreign language meets the precepts underlying the concept of plurilingualism,<sup>9</sup> which is related to the development of a competence that brings together experiences from all languages with which the subject has already had contact or awareness; they interrelate and interact building new meanings (BRASIL, 2017). From the perspective of the ELF, BNCC imprints a drastic change in the treatment and implications of viewing language. This, theoretically, gets closer to the apprentice as it ceases to belong only to the native, allowing certain uses that do not restrict the student to the northern and Euro standards situated. Although there are still many criticisms regarding the understanding of the ELF, here we bring the positive implications with regard to the progress in official documents.

The second concept expands the vision of literacies to multiliteracies: it is the need to educate students in textual multimodalities/multisemiotic (visual, verbal, audiovisual, sensory, auditory, etc.) that emerge from the technological revolution that society is going through. Knowing how to interpret and reinvent meanings has become essential to understand how the process of (re)signification works, which is continuous, dialogical and ideological (BRASIL, 2017).

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<sup>9</sup> The concept will be better detailed in the section "The Children's Stories (CS) Genre as the Organizing Axis of the Proposal".

Briefly, the BNCC postulates:

Conceiving language as a social construction, the subject ‘interprets’, ‘reinvents’ the senses in a situated way, creating new ways of identifying and expressing ideas, feelings and values. In this sense, when assuming its status as a lingua franca – a language that materializes in hybrid uses, marked by fluidity and that opens up to the invention of new ways of saying, driven by pluri/multilingual speakers and their multicultural characteristics – , the English language becomes a symbolic asset for speakers around the world.

It is in this sense that it seems to us that the role of EL teaching in public schools undergoes a paradigm shift. The hegemonic patterns reproduced in private schools and language institutes are replaced by the recognition of the language as a symbolic asset and full of meanings from the multimodalities in which social interactions take place. This assumption is in line with what we previously mentioned as “teaching to learn” (DRUMMOND; GIMENEZ, 2009, p. 108): it is no longer a matter of simply using a tool, but of the autonomy that the multiliteracies allow the student and the teacher. Instead of being a purely marketing instrument, the language acquires a transformative potential that “excels in building literacies capable of promoting the integral development of the student”, which is extremely necessary in “contexts in which the student body mostly constitutes by people from the most disadvantaged classes”, and so this teaching transcends in the form of a cross-cultural tool capable of making the language classroom a space where “creativity, critical thinking and the formation of global citizens are developed” (ROCHA, 2008, p. 438).

We also advocate a change in paradigms, because, according to Freire (1982, p. 36), “we change our understanding and our conscience as we are enlightened about the real conflicts of history. Liberating education can do that – change the understanding of reality”. Therefore, as long as we perpetuate decontextualized language teaching, in a vocabulary list format, disconnected from the student’s integral and critical education, we will also be moving away from the new assumptions expressed in the BNCC, whose concepts we defend in this section.

Although we recognize the progress in terms of official documents in the function of ELT, we believe that the BNCC is lacking when it silences the teaching of EL in the early grades of elementary school.

## **REFLECTIONS FOR FLC IMPLEMENTATION**

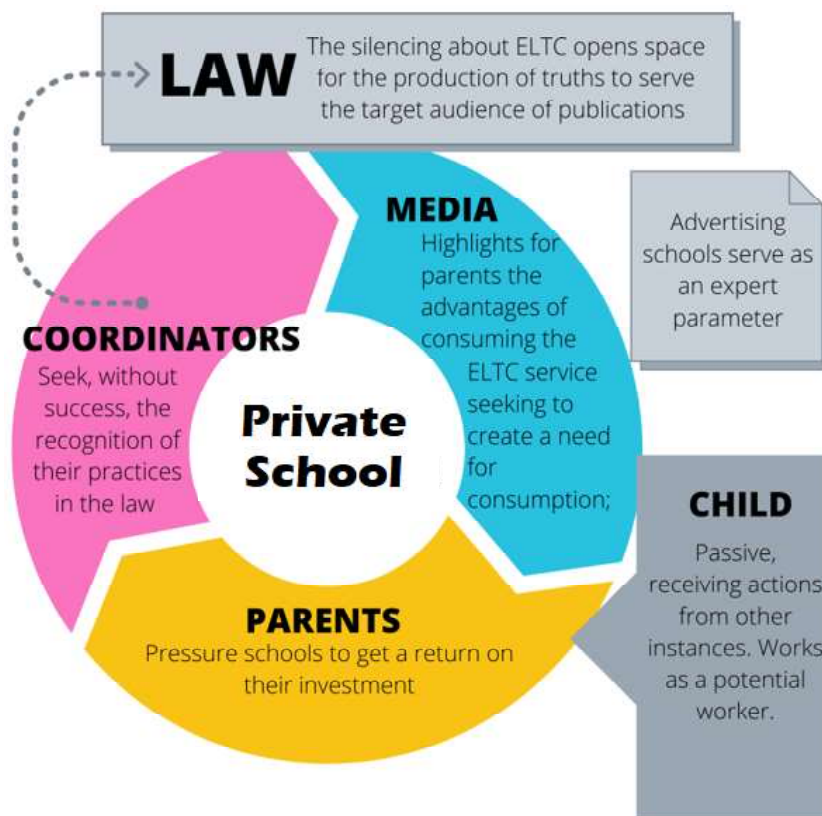
The teaching of FL for children is already consolidated in private schools, and its offer is almost imperative for the success or not of these institutions (ROCHA, 2010). In turn, in the public context, the implementation of FLC has happened selectively, becoming dependent on isolated initiatives and political goodwill (ROCHA, 2010; TANACA, 2017; AVILA, 2019; MAGIOLO, 2019). Tanaca elaborates a table, based on the crossing of data provided by MEC and IBGE, demonstrating that the initiatives of implementation of FLC happen in all regions of the country in a heterogeneous way, overflowing in disordered actions and practices, without teacher training for this job and without a basic curriculum.

In this sense, there seems to be a tension and a mismatch between the practices of public and private schools, which gains mass from the silencing of normative documents on education in Brazil. Garcia (2011) uses discourse analysis to understand the process of implementing EL in private schools. The author analyzes media speeches and coordinators of several private schools and notes that, generally, the marketing function of language teaching is camouflaged within the “sale/registration” discourse of a formative and critical function, as the documents presuppose.

the silencing observed in the law generates space for the production of truths by both private schools and the media, which find in the mass communication vehicles the means of disseminating these meanings. The media

sayings act on the parents, referring them to the place of consumers of these services, and establishing relationships with possible experiences they had with demands from the job market, such as the requirement of fluency in English language to obtain a job or a promotion, for example. When they become consumers of this service, parents project their children as potential competitors in this market and start to pressure schools in terms of production, that is, they seek to see in their children’s linguistic production the return on the investment made by consuming the service (GARCIA, 2011, p. 137).

The author argues that for private (and/or international<sup>10</sup>), schools, the function/reason for teaching English seems to assume a more marketing character than the student formation as a social being.<sup>11</sup> This can be seen in Figure 1, which shows how the child becomes passive in this process.



Source: Adapted from Garcia (2011).

Figure 1 – Justification for offering of ELT in private schools

According to Figure 1, the child – who should play a central role – is linked to the desire/will of his/her parents/guardians and does not participate in the process that justifies the inclusion of EL in the curriculum. Parents/guardians put pressure on the principal/coordinators influenced by the media, which clearly emphasizes the advantages and the need to consume this “product”, which is EL. Institutions have no legal support to

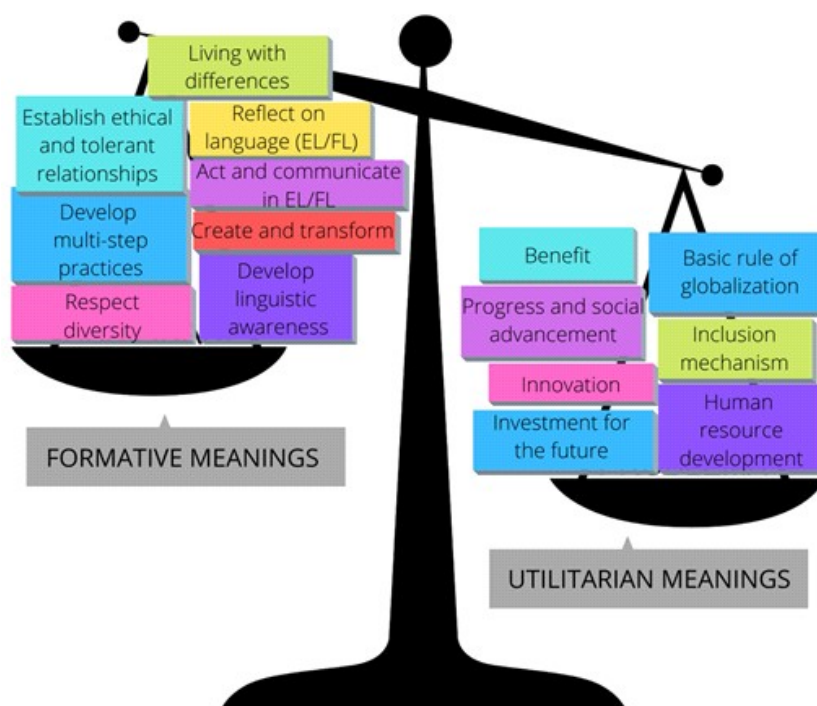
<sup>10</sup> The author defines the term “international schools” as “the most elite segment of ELT for children provider, being accessible only to wealthier families, due to its high cost. In these schools, the curriculum followed is that of the country of origin, with or without compliance with the PCNs. These schools offer international certification and are recognized by bodies such as the International Schools Association or the European Council of International Schools. The instruction takes place predominantly in the language of the country of origin and the Portuguese language is treated as foreign” (GARCIA, 2011, p. 18).

<sup>11</sup> Even though, frequently, the discourse does not show this transparently. To reach this conclusion, Garcia (2011) used discourse analysis to analyze the statements of coordinators, parents and the media about teaching English since childhood.

regulate their practices and become a parameter for the media to “produce truths” about language teaching. In this cycle, the formative function is lost and the child becomes a mere recipient of the actions of his/her parents/guardians, institutions and the media.

It is important to understand that practices offered by the private context cannot be imported into the public school, precisely because they do not have the child at the center of the FL teaching process, understood here as a holistic training space, within an ELF perspective, claimed by the multiliteracies and by the concern of not perpetuating the native’s image as an example of target language.

Similarly, Tanaca (2017) analyzes two news items, from the city of Londrina-PR, related to the inclusion of EL in the curriculum of the early years, and notes that the media highlights the utilitarian justifications with much more “weight”, as we can see in Figure 2.



Source: Adapted from Tanaca (2017).

Figure 2 – Media justifications for the inclusion of EL in the city of Londrina-PR

We perceive, by the image, that the formative senses lose value in face of media discourses that, uninformed in educational questions, (re)produce information of utilitarian meanings, surpassed in discussions between researchers in the area of language and teaching, for some time. It is in this sense that, reiterating our objectives, we intend to promote a reflection on the teaching of EL that can, in some way, contribute to the languages teaching in public context and with the student’s role in the teaching and learning process.

Therefrom, the following question arises: how to organize the offering and teaching of EL in the early years? We obviously recognize that there is not only one answer to this question, considering mainly that Brazil is a country of great territorial extension that encompasses diverse cultures, knowledge, contexts. However, we understand that it is not possible to simply borrow the practices of the private context and implement them in the public sphere, as they do not share the same functions, as we pointed out in this section.



We highlight the urgency of regulating FL teaching in the early grades, so that implementations in the early years can benefit from similar guiding principles and functions, therefore private school practices and northern and Euro-oriented teaching models and approaches are not taken as absolute and imported truths without criticism.

## **THE CHILDREN’S STORIES (CS) GENRE AS THE ORGANIZING AXIS OF THE PROPOSAL**

Based on the assumptions presented above, aiming precisely at a change in the paradigms of conventional proposals for teaching English in childhood, we anchored ourselves in Tonelli (2005), who argues from other authors (WRIGHT, 1995; VYGOTSKY, 2001; among others), on the use of CS in language teaching to children. For her, CS provides contextualized and meaningful teaching for the little ones, since children tend to appreciate the moment of storytelling. This is corroborated by our empirical and practical knowledge that literature can be an important ally in the classroom. Even without using the “reading games” proposed by the author as a didactic tool to work on the thematic content of the stories, we believe that CS can be the organizing element of our proposal because it allows for the engendering of the concepts exposed by the BNCC revisited in the previous section, as well as the student’s education and emancipation as a social being.

By choosing the CS genre to organize the teaching of English to children, we understand, as did Tonelli (2005), that “the involvement with topics that are significant for that age group (topics covered in CS), inserted in a larger work context (the CS storytelling, detailed exploration of them, activities related to them, for example), can be seen as a promising proposal for teaching/learning languages related to children” (p. 46).

The CS can therefore be an asset in foreign language classes as long as it is chosen and used appropriately. Another significant fact is that today the children’s book market is vast and diversified, since the branch was responsible for almost a quarter of all book sales in Brazil, in 2017.<sup>12</sup> Thus, there are numerous options for the teacher who wishes to employ CS in his classes; however, considering the formative character that we intend with this teaching, it is necessary to look in the literature for mechanisms to select works that specifically contemplate our objectives. This section, therefore, will make a bibliographic review to understand the CS genre and its evolution in history so that we can define the characteristics of the texts most relevant to our proposal.

In this sense, we divided the choice of CS into two stages in which the following requirements will be verified: 1) emancipation of the reader (related to the content) – it is common in children’s literature to produce books that have the only explicitly marked objective of transmitting a value unquestionable morals, an absolute truth. This typology of text can inhibit the criticality of the child/student, pruning their desire and/or ability to argue against or in favor of what they believe in (ZILBERMAN; MAGALHÃES, 1982; ZILBERMAN 2003); and 2) the BNCC concepts (related to language) – the language view presented and whether the work contemplates the multiliteracies, that is, if from that book it is possible to explore other textual semiotics, in addition to the verbally written.

In the following, we present the epistemological basis for these two stages.

### **The Production of Books for Children: authoritarian and emancipatory literature**

To understand the concepts of authoritarian and emancipatory literature, it is necessary, previously, to understand that the evolution of book production for children is linked to the relationships between

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<sup>12</sup> According to the Book Sale Panel prepared by the National Union of Book Publishers (SNEL). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3wjviGg>.

adult-child, teacher-student, master-apprentice, which have been modified in the process of the evolution of society within history. Several authors express the importance of understanding these interactions and rescue the way childhood and its attributions were (de)valued at moments in history (ZILBERMAN; MAGALHÃES, 1982; ROSEMBERG, 1984; LAJOLO; ZILBERMAN, 1999; POSTMAN, 1999; TONELLI; CHAGURI, 2014; ZILBERMAN 2003; among others).

Lajolo and Zilberman (1999) place children's story and literature side by side. We observed in linearity how the history<sup>13</sup> influenced the stories written for children, which is important to understand the evolution of the genre defined in this proposal. In this sense, such influences are corroborated among all the other consulted authors, unanimous in inferring that the 17th and 18th centuries were essential for the constitution of the family institution as we know it today (private single-family structure, according to ZILBERMAN, 2003, p. 17); since feudalism and its systems of exchanging favors were in decline and, consequently, also the narrow obligations towards different social groups were erased and replaced by other values: "the primacy of domestic life, founded on marriage and the education of heirs; the importance of the affection and solidarity of its members; privacy and intimacy" (ZILBERMAN, 2003, p. 17).

It is from this context that the first books *for*<sup>14</sup> children emerge at the end of the 17th century.<sup>15</sup> The act of reading became a sign of civility, a habit financed by the industrialization of culture, thus generating the socialization of knowledge. From this point, there is the expansion of the editorial market, the rise of the newspaper as a means of communication, the growth of the population of readers and the expansion of the school network, which initially appeared within the intention of educating according to conservative, authoritarian and moralists, asserting itself as a political institution (ZILBERMAN; MAGALHÃES, 1982; ROSEMBERG, 1984; LAJOLO; ZILBERMAN, 1999; ZILBERMAN, 2003).

In Brazil, specifically, "in this climate of valuing instruction and the school, simultaneously with a varied literary production, it arises a general concern with the lack of adequate reading material for Brazilian children" (LAJOLO; ZILBERMAN, 1999, p. 28), when, from this emergency, the industry of this branch increases significantly in number of published works in the country. Such ascension happened in association with the pedagogy that used stories, fables and tales to implant a moral and ethical value, whose system described the child as a simple observer, capable only to assimilate rules as they were presented to them. The book, therefore, "became one of the instruments through which pedagogy aimed to achieve its objectives" (ZILBERMAN; MAGALHÃES, 1982, p. 12).

As childhood gains notoriety *in* and *for* society, authors of children's books also give more importance to the representation of the child within their books. It is only in the middle of the 19th century that children's stories start having children as main characters who manage, on their own (without the help of magic or the figure of the adult), to resolve their internal or external conflicts. We can mention, in this context, Alice (in Wonderland), Dorothy (The Wizard of OZ), Peter Pan (LAJOLO; ZILBERMAN, 1999, p. 73), and in Brazil, the whole group of the *Sítio do Pica-Pau Amarelo* (p. 132). It is important to note that the fantastic and the magic continue to be present in the narratives; however, agency and awareness bring together readers and characters, reality and fantasy (ZILBERMAN; MAGALHÃES, 1982; ROSEMBERG, 1984; LAJOLO; ZILBERMAN, 1999; ZILBERMAN 2003).

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<sup>13</sup> In the Portuguese version, there is an intentional repetition of the words to refer to the title of the work: "*Literatura infantil brasileira, História & histórias*" (LAJOLO; ZILBERMAN, 1999),

<sup>14</sup> Rosemberg (1984, p. 29) discusses how children and youth literature legitimizes the asymmetric relationship between adult-child, in which adults are the "possessors of access to creation" of the message and children are "dispossessed recipients", treating themselves if so an adult **to** children communication and not a communication **between** adult and children.

<sup>15</sup> In this case, we can cite the first writers: Charles Perrault and, later, (19th century) the Grimm Brothers, who impose, as the only tool available to the characters in fairy tales, fantasy, magic or a supernatural force for the resolution conflicts in the narratives.

The children's book that until then was based on authoritarian pedagogy – which pleads principles and rules to children and leaves no space for reflection, awareness and agency of the individual – shyly starts to value the aesthetics defended today as emancipatory literature. Zilberman (2003, p. 215) presents the term as an emancipatory model of literature, saying that Monteiro Lobato could represent the first example in Brazil, “refusing the intermediation of parents in the relationship between the child and reality, puts his heroes in a position of autonomy in relation to a superior and dominating instance”.

We understand that it is the character's autonomy factor, as well as freedom of thought – without stereotyped and generalized representations of reality and society that emerge as the intrinsic characteristics of the narrative – that will determine the emancipatory character of a work; that is, the more distant the text of the commitment to the transmission of absolute and unquestionable truths is, the more chances of emancipation and autonomy it will present to the reader. This does not mean that the genre does not fulfill its formative function, since literature has this character in its essence, after all, in the words of Candido (1972, p. 805):

Literature can form; but not according to official pedagogy. [...]. Far from being an appendix to moral and civic education, [...] it acts with the indiscriminate impact of life itself and educates like it. [...] Given that literature teaches to the extent that it operates with its entire range, it is artificial to want it to function as the manuals of virtue and good conduct. And society can only choose what at each moment seems to be adapted to its ends, because even the works considered indispensable for the formation of the young man often bring what the conventions would wish to ban.

Engaged in Candido, based on the statement that literature “does not corrupt or edify, but humanizes in a profound sense, because it makes you live” (p. 806), we consider it essential that the teacher dedicates time and attention to this first step to choose the works to be used in the classroom. It is from working with children's literature, emancipatory and non-authoritarian, that we developed our pedagogical proposal.

## **Literature, Language and Multiliteracies**

In addition to the emancipatory character and, still, as one of the characteristics that can contribute to reach this level of text, we started to discuss three implications of the Common National Curricular Base – BNCC (BRASIL, 2017) that can, considering the process of literary choices, contribute to (re)think about the notion of curriculum previously presented with regard to language. They are: English as a lingua franca, plurilingualism and multimodality.

Firstly, BNCC “prioritizes the focus of the social and political function of English and, in this sense, starts to treat it in its lingua franca status” (p. 239). This implication requires, from our point of view, a reflection on the relations between language, territory and culture, since there are more EL speakers outside the territories where this language is official, which implies “displacing it from an ideal model of speaker, considering the importance of culture in teaching and learning the language and seeking to break with aspects related to linguistic ‘correction’, ‘precision’ and ‘proficiency’” (p. 242). We can infer from this, that there is, to a certain extent, a concern in this document with plurilingualism and the interaction between cultures. For this reason, within the five organizing axes<sup>16</sup> that BNCC proposes, there is the axis of the intercultural dimension, which is born:

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<sup>16</sup> The organizing axes of the BNCC are: orality, reading, writing, linguistic knowledge, and intercultural dimension (BRASIL, 2017).

from the understanding that cultures, especially in contemporary society, are in a continuous process of interaction and (re)construction. In this way, different groups of people, with different linguistic and cultural interests, agendas and repertoires, experience, in their contacts and interactional flows, processes of constitution of open and plural identities. This is the scenario of English as a lingua franca, and in it, learning English implies problematizing the different roles of the English language itself in the world, its values, its scope and its effects on the relationships between different people and peoples, both in contemporary society and in a historical perspective. In this sense, the treatment of English as a lingua franca imposes challenges and new priorities for teaching, including the intensification of reflections on the relations between language, identity and culture, and the development of intercultural competence (BRASIL, 2017, p. 245).

It is worth mentioning that the Curricular Base does not adopt the term *plurilingualism* – the one we point out as the second implication discussed – which would not be coherent, since the document restricts the teaching of foreign languages to EL. However, we recovered this concept by understanding that it is not just a matter of offering more languages in the curriculum and, in this sense, we agree with the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CONSELHO DA EUROPA, 2001, p. 23), by assuming that

the plurilingual approach goes beyond this perspective and emphasizes the fact that, as an individual's personal experience in his cultural context expands, from the language spoken at home to that of society in general and, later, to the languages of other peoples (learned at school, at 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, to which all knowledge and experience of languages contribute and in which languages interrelate and interact.

This stage of choosing the work must consider the possibility of a plurilingual<sup>17</sup> approach based on the language presented, recognizing the language as “hybrid, polyphonic and multimodal” (BRASIL, 2017, p. 245). Multimodality is the third important implication to define the CS to be used, aiming at the multiliteracies that can be provided to the student during the FL learning process. In today's world, surrounded by different cultures and overwhelmed by technology, there has been a lot of debate about how to incorporate different resources into our school practices and make them part of the student/teacher context. However, it must be borne in mind that technology is not the only new language around us. Agra (2016, p. 39) admits that “we are often bombarded with images, sounds, videos, gestures, for example. Therefore, there is no way to think about the teaching-learning process based only on verbal texts”. To understand the concept of multiliteracy, which is precisely the scope of all this media, digital, cultural and linguistic diversity, we turn to Rojo (2012, p. 9) when stating that

new tools are needed – in addition to those of manual writing (paper, pen, pencil, pen, chalk and blackboard) and printed (typography, press) – audio, video, image processing, editing and diagramming. New practices are required – production, in these and others, increasingly new, tools; of critical analysis as a receiver. New and multiliteracies are needed.

We also believe that it is necessary to realize that the relationship between words and images has undergone a major change, especially in the CS' books that started to introduce these multimodal texts combining

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<sup>17</sup> We will expand this discussion in the next section in which we present the values nested in our proposal, however, it was necessary to cover this issue at this point to demonstrate that these concepts (lingua franca and plurilingualism) are linked to the CS' selection process.

their interpretations for the production of meanings.<sup>18</sup>

It is what has been called the multimodality or multisemiosis of contemporary texts, which require multiliteracies. That is, texts that are composed of many languages (or modes, or semioses) and that require skills, as well as understanding and production practices for each one of them (multiliteracies) to make it meaningful (ROJO, 2012, p. 7).

Bringing the concept to the field of literature and language teaching, we should be able to “escape from” shallow translations and, instead, provide our students with deeper and more meaningful contacts that are capable of generating new experiences and meanings for these texts. It is pertinent, in this sense, to argue about the approach of activities and the use of multisemiotic texts as an incentive to pedagogical practice; in a multimodal and/or multisemiotic text, all the elements will collaborate for the interpretation: the image, the types of letters, the colors, the formats, the sizes of the images, the textures of the pages, the representations of reality and the imaginary, too, they will be carriers of meaning and will bring information that needs to be inferred in the context of interpreting.

Thus, to achieve its emancipatory power and a formative character of teaching, our proposal must elect CS that are: 1) interactive inside and outside the pages of the book; 2) characterized by the presence of varied elements that can produce different meanings and that lead the student to reflect critically on the theme presented; 3) are hybrid texts of languages, modalities and cultures. Points that must be organized so that language education in the public school is transformative, aiming, therefore, “the construction of necessary multiliteracies in the new language, so that the student is able to engage in social practices mediated by language” (ROCHA, 2007, p. 22).

We reiterate that “it is imperative to think about the teaching-learning process beyond the letter, that is, encompassing the construction of meanings through other signs than just words” (ROCHA, 2007, p. 17). Based on this premise, we return to our central objective of thinking about FL teaching in public schools, and assuming the CS genre as a starting point, the process of choosing the work(s) must take into account the notes made here from the implications brought by BNCC (English as a lingua franca, plurilingualism, multimodality).

## **FOR A MULTILINGUAL AND SENSITIVE EDUCATION TO THE OTHER(S)**

The reflections made so far show us the need for a new educational policy, and with regard to the teaching of FL, such a change in posture is even more evident, given the growing erasure of political, cultural, social and linguistic boundaries. In this sense, it can no longer be said that each language exists in its territory, quite the contrary; they circulate, transit, interact, change and are always evolving (CONSELHO DA EUROPA, 2001).

In this context, promoting education for diversity has become an imperative of linguistic educational policies in Europe, especially from the 1970s, with the movement designated as British Language Awareness

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<sup>18</sup> An example of this type of multimodality is books without text. Suzy Lee’s trilogy “Wave”, “Mirror” and “Shadow” brings a wealth of image and no words, but great reading sensitivity. In “Mirror”, through a seductive visual narrative, with graffiti and watercolor, the author presents the first encounter of a little girl with the mirror. In the rhythm of the games, between discoveries and dances, the contact becomes so intense that the girl and her reflection become one (available at: <https://bit.ly/2TeG8yJ>). Another example of multimodality that conquered the media was “Wreck this Journal”, by Canadian illustrator and artist Kery Smith, which invites the reader to vent his frustrations through actions against the book itself. Leaving aside questions of aesthetic appreciation, the proposal is, to say the least, interesting.

Movement, disseminated by Eric W. Hawkins, Peter Garret, Carl James, among others. Hawkins (1984) was a pioneer in this movement and advocated the implementation of Language Awareness (LA) in language study programs since primary school, extending to secondary education, with the aim of bridging and filling a gap left in teaching between FL and the first language of the learners. James and Garret (1995) recognize the difficulty of defining the term, given the multidisciplinary characteristic that LA can achieve. According to them, LA aims to stimulate the discussion about language and linguistic diversity, increasing confidence about the four communicative skills. For teachers, using LA as a strategy is not simply a process of translation and comparison, it is reflecting on the implications of the language using their mother tongue as a reference (GARRET; JAMES, 1993).

In this regard, Hawkins (1999) is quite incisive regarding the use of mother tongue in teaching LE. The author shows that it is scientifically proven that the processes of acquisition of the mother tongue and learning FL are constituted as brain activities that happen in different regions of the brain, putting in check Chomsky's theory that all human beings are born with a language acquisition device (LAD). Therefore, FL must be acquired naturally and without the use or support of the mother tongue. Hawkins does not dispute the existence of this device, but ponders: "Foreign language teachers wrongly suppose that mere exposure of the hypothesised LAD to the new language (comprehensible input) for four short sessions per week without any explanation of how the language worked, would ensure acquisition" (p. 134).

In another perspective, James and Garret (1995) warn that LA should not be used as an alternative to language teaching methodology, but when worked/applied in parallel to FL learning, benefits can be observed in five domains: affective, social, power, cognitive and performative (GARRET; JAMES, 1993, p. 11-12). According to the authors, the need to address linguistic and cultural diversity emerged from a set of linguistic currents (didactic and pedagogical) that defended the importance of developing in students the ability to observe and analyze languages, to develop perspective, to understand them, and to compare them in the complexity of intercultural relations (HAWKINS, 1984; PERREGAUX, 1998). In general, this approach aims, above all, to make students conscious<sup>19</sup> about the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity, preparing them for future foreign languages learning, arousing curiosity, taste, openness towards them, and developing diverse skills that provide a reflection on the language and culture of the other.

In this line of reasoning, education for diversity can promote the development of the social skills of the learner as a whole, as well as his sense of identity. This is what Tonelli and Cordeiro (2014) call the principle of openness/sensitiveness of languages, in a proposal to teach EL for children based on a multilingual approach. The authors base their proposal on the teaching material EOLE<sup>20</sup> (*Education et ouverture aux langues à l'école*), used in French-speaking Switzerland in early childhood education and primary school, with the aim of sensitizing students to the various languages that coexist in the world and promoting plurilingualism. The authors propose a didactic sequence (DOLZ; NOVERRAZ; SCHNEUWLY, 2004) that mobilizes the principles established to teach ELC using an CS, with the intention that "children can, from the first contact with EL, reflect on languages from comparison between them" (TONELLI; CORDEIRO, 2014, p. 52). The objectives of the activities presented are:

- a) to develop in students positive attitudes of openness to linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as the capacities of representation, analysis and reflection on language and languages;
- b) to expand knowledge about languages,

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<sup>19</sup> The Portuguese correspondent for this term must be addressed: although some dictionaries bring the verbs "*conscientizar*" and "*conscientizázar*" as synonyms, we have opted for a corresponding term to "*conscientizázar*" to designate something that is conscientious, that is, relative to awareness itself, something that should emerge naturally. The term was also chosen to differentiate from "*conscientização*", by Paulo Freire, also used in this article as "conscientization".

<sup>20</sup> This material is available at: <https://bit.ly/3vdfVxE>.

enrolling learners in a contemporary multilingual context; c) to increase students' motivation for language learning and work on students' attitudes towards the different languages with which they may come into contact; d) to develop in students the ability to perceive sound differences (sometimes minimal) and extremely useful for learning a language; e) to develop students' curiosity for discovering the functioning of languages, their ability to hear and recognize unfamiliar languages in writing, developing the capacity for auditory and visual discrimination; f) to structure the students' linguistic knowledge in relation to the comparative approach between languages, developing in them the reflection on the language; g) to build a languaging culture and promote attitudes of openness to plurilingualism, among others (p. 54).

We understand that the principle of openness/sensitiveness to languages developed by Perregaux (1998) and taken up by Tonelli and Cordeiro (2014) can be a promoter of a multilingual approach within a teaching proposal that is meaningful to the student/child.

Therefore, we advocate that the elaboration of our didactic proposal must consider the reflection on languages and everything that emanates from them: cultures, ways of being and acting, prioritizing respect and interaction between them.

## **FINALLY, WHAT KIND OF ENGLISH IS IT THAT WE WANT TO TEACH?**

This question leads us to the main objective of this article: to propose some initial reflections on a proposal for teaching EL for children. We use the term *initial reflections* because we believe that it is of fundamental importance that the researcher be very clear about his epistemological basis to build any teaching material and/or proposal, to the same extent the teacher has an understanding of his practices and objectives in the classroom. Our aim was to (re)think fossilized concepts about foreign language teaching and thus be able to develop a didactic proposal for the teaching of English for the early years of elementary school, which is consistent with the chosen context (the public school), and which objectives are based on solid and significant foundations for the holistic formation of the student.

Considering the delimitation of the CS genre as an organizing element of this proposal, the bibliographic research developed showed us that in order to achieve our goals of a holistic student education, the choice of the literary work would be an important step in the process. We were able to identify that CS of authoritarian features would not allow the necessary discussions and reflections for such training. In the opposite direction, we must privilege work with books that leave space for reflection and the formation of critical opinion.

From the implications of changing paradigms expressed in the BNCC text, we understand that the language also deserves attention, in order to expand the student's repertoire in relation to what it means to be/speak as a native, to whom this foreign language belongs, as well as the multimodality in which all social practices take place and which they appropriate. We observe, therefore, that the works that present multisemiotic proposals can also act in the emancipation process of the reader and in the creation of unique spaces of interaction between this and the text.

Another approach that should guide the production of the activities in our proposal is plurilingualism, seeking to sensitize the student to different languages, cultures, ways of being and acting in a world that is plural. In this sense, we have appropriated concepts from the LA movement and from the EOLE material to promote the principle of openness/sensitiveness of languages from a CS.

In terms of synthesis, we intend to go beyond merely formal learning, that is, language by language or the language simply as a tool for effective communication, with segmented vocabulary lists and without context. According to Freire (2003, p. 36), "we change our understanding and our conscience as we are enlightened about the real conflicts in history. Libertarian education can do that – change the understanding

of reality”. Thus, an education for emancipation, conceived according to Freire, as a cultural and social action for liberation, can constitute a valuable instrument in projects and actions aimed at empowering individuals.

Therefore, among the main reasons in favor of this teaching, we cite its potential, under favorable conditions, to take the child to break cultural barriers and broaden his horizons, to critically promote the student’s cognitive, linguistic, sociocultural and psychological development, to contribute to the formation of their linguistic awareness and positive attitudes towards differences and, finally, to prepare more solid ground for language learning in later grades.

Finally, it must be said that the reflection carried out here was developed in order to guide our next steps. We hope that it can be a source of research and inspiration for future proposals by teachers and researchers who share our views of teaching, of the world, of being and acting in contemporary times.

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