

Critical Literacy and Affect in Contemporary Language Education: Reflections on Educational Proposals at the University¹

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Abstract:

The challenges of survival in dark times, marked by the destructive power of a virus and the equally devastating force of necropolitics (MBEMBE, 2016) are felt in different spheres of society, with significant impacts on contemporary language education. In this context, the deprivation of social contact as a result of the forced establishment of remote teaching proved to be a challenge for the construction of the classroom as a space of feeling, intimacy (HOOKS, 2017) and of hopeful love (FREIRE, 2013, 2014). This is the difficult scenario that circumscribes the didactic sequence discussed in this article. The proposal, which was worked on in an English language course with university students, starts from a literary text to discuss racism, affectivity and (lack of) hope. The sensitive themes reverberated in the emotions of the students, proving to be painful for many of them and raising questions of different orders. Thus, the objective of this article is to discuss the potential of affect for language education in its interface with critical literacy, in order to favor dialogue, embodied listening and hope, even in situations of conflict inherent to working with criticality.

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Language education. Affect. Critical literacy.

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1. OPENING WORDS ABOUT OUR TIMES AND HOPES AT THE FRONTIERS OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE

In this article, we intend to discuss language education in a university context, arguing in favor of the importance of critical-affective literacy (ANWARUDDIN, 2016) for the experience of a transformative educational process in the current times of crisis. To do so, we briefly reflect on our reality and on the challenges for an education committed to social and cognitive justice (SANTOS, 2016) and, therefore, hopefully critical, loving, democratizing, emancipatory and libertarian (FREIRE, 2013, 2014).

We are currently undergoing catastrophic times, whose disjunctures – economical and sociopolitical – affect our lives and the planet in an overwhelming way. The current global health crisis, triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, opens wide – locally and globally – the abyssal differences that structure our society and that perpetuate hegemonic thinking, which silences the voice of minorities and marginalized groups, violently and overwhelmingly invalidating their ways of existing in the world.

In a recent past, Duboc and Ferraz (2018) have already warned us about the emergence of a crisis marked by the dangers of the circulation of neoconservative discourses, supported by racist, homophobic and sexist principles, silencing the differences. Thus, on the one hand, we live a policy of distancing and hatred sustained by binarisms that reinforce the distance between “us” and “them”: “the rich and the poor, center and periphery, developed and underdeveloped, North and South, Western and Oriental, civilized and barbaric, high culture and low culture, Christian and non-Christian, modern and primitive” (DUBOC; FERRAZ, 2018, p. 231). On the other hand, we observe the same ultra-conservative perspectives seeking to delegitimize the struggles of minority groups under the meritocratic fallacy of equal opportunities.

According to Holanda (2021), at the current moment,

[...] we are experiencing a crisis of the civilizational process (mute vision) of modernity, of its cognitive empire and economic systems, capitalism and socialism. Therefore, it is not just that we are faced with the challenge of confronting the crises of the economic systems, but defying the crisis of exhaustion of a civilizing process.

In dark contemporary times, marked by the violent confluence of various crises (HOLANDA, 2021), the rupture of the current social order depends on our interest in the (re)construction of alternative realities and other world sensibilities (MIGNOLO, 2017). In this way, it is important to overcome anger and fear, among other effects that undermine our power of action (ESPINOSA, 2008; MASSUMI, 2015), so that it is possible to resist, with resilience, the imposed violence, as well as to announce possibilities for the experience of critical utopia and, therefore, for the realization of the viable unprecedented (FREIRE, 2014; LIBERALI, 2020). In other words, as Holanda (2021) points out, it is urgent that we collectively seek a “different political action” that, challenging “exhausted models”, enables us to “renew for a transformative action”.

As we well know, Paulo Freire's philosophical thought is closely linked to the idea of transforming the world and, on these bases, it is potentially capable of helping us to (re)think (language) education in the midst of the chaos we experience. In the words of Freire (2016, p. 101), in a work written with collaborators, "Education is a way of understanding the world with the aim of transforming it". When rereading Freire's work, Kohan (2019, p. 64) highlights the close connection between Paulo Freire's thought and politics, education and life, and this unifying philosophy proves to be the driving force "of a problematizing education that allows for the awareness of the conditions of oppression", enabling its subversion. This philosophical dimension, constitutive of Freire's work, also reveals itself as "a way of bringing together theory and practice, abstraction and concreteness, reflection and action, thought and life", from which the tensions, complexities and contradictions of the world can be experienced under a critical and transformative lens (KOHAN, 2019, p. 65).

The transformative (language) education is carried out, therefore, through a constant and dynamic exercise of deepening our epistemological curiosity, which allows criticality to be experienced in all its potential for resistance and social renewal. Thus, critical (language) education also proves to be questioning, socially responsible and supportive. As argued by Freire (2016, p. 92, emphasis added), "I came into the world not to adapt to it, but to assume the *responsibility* of being here. And being here means interfering in this today, in this one". As Freire (2013) well complements, our presence *in the world*, in turn, implies the expansion of our views and our sensitivity, so that we can, when exercising our socially critical responsibility, also be *with the world* and occupy, in a communal and solidary way, collective spaces in all their plurality.

In Freire's perspective, "the transformative power of a theory or thought resides in its ability to affect, in some way, the ways of life it seeks to understand" (KOHAN, 2019, p. 65-66). In this sense, it is important to undermine the often imposed separation between educational practices and life. In these times of deep crises, it is urgent to seek, freireanly, possibilities of creating "another school and another education", but also and mainly, "another life", under less oppressive and socially and cognitively fairer aegis (KOHAN, 2019, p. 80).

In this horizon, it is relevant to mention that, as a socioculturally constituted social practice, language is always loaded with experiential experiences and ideologically saturated (VOLÓCHINOV, 2017). Language education, in this sense, is constructed in order to promote the exercise of criticality, in a situated way and concerned not only with confronting the power relations inherent to social and language practices, but also with the production of possibilities for which logics or alternative world sensibilities are constructed (MIGNOLO, 2017).

When reflecting on the processes of production of meanings in language teaching for academic purposes, Chun (2015) argues that criticality, in this scenario, implies the struggle against the hegemonic logic posed, allied to the redistribution of power in these spaces, aiming at the subversion of a social order ruled by inequalities in economic terms and also in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, among other elements that structure relations of oppression and silencing in our daily lives. In turn, for Safatle (2020), social relations are not organized solely on the basis of the production and circulation of goods and wealth, but also of affections, since these are the bases for the constitution of our bonds. Therefore, in the most diverse political regimes, the mastery of the modes of affection is a crucial element for social control.

Affect, in this perspective, can be understood as the affections that increase or reduce our power of action in the world (ESPINOSA, 2008). Affect relates to all manifestations that have an effect on both our body and our soul, by altering the power of our body to act, and also its power of thinking (GLEIZER, 2005). In line with the work of Safatle (2020) and supported by the dialogical vision that marks the works of the Bakhtinian Circle, we consider that affect is also ideologically charged. As Bakhtin (2017, p. 86, emphasis added) tells us, everything we actually experience "receives an *intonation*, has an emotional-volitional tone and enters into an *affective relationship* with me in the unity of the event that encompasses us".

It should be noted that affectivity has been discussed and investigated for a long time, in the most varied fields of knowledge, from different approaches. More specifically, in Applied Linguistics (ARAGÃO, 2010; BARCELOS, 2013, among others), affect and emotions have also received increasing attention for several decades, in perspectives that challenge dualistic thinking. In the same vein, as Leite (2018) discusses, in the

educational field, the monist conception has stood out, taking Vygotsky (1993) and Wallon (1978) as some of the main theoretical interlocutors. From this perspective, the understanding of affectivity or affect as a broader and more complex process – which eventually constitutes human sociocultural development – has been reiterated by many studies. Still relying on Leite (2018), this process incorporates more elaborate human experiences and forms of expression. It involves emotion, seen as the primary link between the subject and his environment, as well as feelings, marked by their psychological nature and, thus, characterized by representational elements and of longer duration.

In this regard, Massumi (2015) complements, emphasizing that emotions can be understood as a partial expression of affect, since no emotional state could express all the complexity and breadth of our experiences and the power of affecting and being affected by everyone and by everything that surrounds us, when immersed in the social fabric, that is, in cultural, political and economic life. Affect is, therefore, located in the potentialities produced by encounters in the world and not in the interiority of a subject conceived solely in biological and psychological terms. Thus, affect is politically and socioculturally involved in the most varied modes of experience and, therefore, also in language. In general, approaches that consider power in human relationships and recognize the ideological nature of language practices refute dualities such as body and mind, reason and feeling, while challenging exclusively representational models of thought and perception (MASSUMI, 2015). From this perspective, affect, as a concept, assumes a political, transversal, complex nature and is potentially open to transformation (MASSUMI, 2015).

On these terms, we continue to discuss the interfaces of a language education process that is liberatingly transformative (FREIRE, 2013, 2014), critically engaged (HOOKS, 2020) and significantly multiliterate (LIBERALI; MEGALE, 2019).

2. AMID MULTILITERATE LANGUAGE EDUCATION, AFFECT AND CRITICALITY

The purpose of language education committed to social transformation and, thus, pedagogically engaged, is to produce, nurture and expand possibilities so that students are instigated to “recover the will [...] to think and recover the will to achieve total self-realization”, allowing the experience of critical thinking (HOOKS, 2020, p. 24). In turn, it is worth mentioning that “the core of critical thinking is the yearning to know – to understand how life works” (HOOKS, 2020, p. 22-23). In order to demonstrate its transgressive force, this movement of strategic engagement “emphasizes mutual participation, because it is the movement of ideas exchanged between all people that builds a relevant working relationship for everyone in the classroom” (HOOKS, 2020, p. 36).

The transformative force of this critically engaged pedagogy has suffered violent attacks in recent times, as language education, more specifically regarding literacy practices permeated by criticality, has been challenged by alienating forces of oppressive ideologies (LIBERALI; MEGALE, 2019). Monte Mór (2015) emphasizes that reflections on (multi/new) literacies, in our country, align with Freire’s postulates, refuting uncritical and apolitical views on literacy practices, in favor of a situated and meaningful approach. From this perspective, “Literacy is then associated with ways of being in the world and not just with what is transmitted to someone in the process of schooling [...]” (JORDÃO; MARTINEZ; MONTE MÓR, 2018, p. 11).

In this scenario, as Monte Mór (2018, p. 323) argues,

[...] critical literacy is built on the premise that language has a political nature, depending on the power relations present in it. Therefore, it is understood that the discourse is always permeated by ideologies, regardless of the modality and context in which it is presented.

In its interface with the new multiliteracies, the notion of critical literacy contributes “to the deepening of the work on the expansion of perspectives”, favoring a problematizing attitude, inciting questioning and, thus, allowing the expansion of our thinking and our interpretative possibilities (MONTE MÓR, 2018, p. 322).

In this educational context, Monte Mór (2018) defends the interpretative expansion linked to critical literacy practices, based on a situated work of construction of meanings.

We can align this educational approach in the face of critical literacy with the proposal of *signifying through multiliteracy*, presented by Liberali and Megale (2019). Based on the theories of (multi)literacies, “to signify through multiliteracy makes room for subjects to understand reality and actually build possibilities to intervene in it” (LIBERALI; MEGALE, 2019, p. 68). By signifying through multiliteracy, subjects critically and responsibly assume their place as agents of transformation in the world and “rebuild culture with more equitable possibilities of existence” (LIBERALI; MEGALE, 2019, p. 69).

It is worth remembering that language practices are ideologically and affectively loaded (BAKHTIN, 2017). Thus, if resistance is an existential need, also lovingness – towards us, towards “the world and people, animals, trees, waters, life” – is fundamental to our existence (FREIRE, 2013, p. 399). According to Kohan (2019, p. 123), “love is a vital force”, and this affect is political as it implies a love “for living life to expand it and never to reduce it”. In line with the philosophical thought of Giuseppe Ferraro, Kohan (2019, p. 132) goes on to say that love is essential to education and to everything, since “it is the very measure of inhabiting the world”. Thus, (language) education can be (metaphorically) understood as “an artistic, musical, philosophical work with feelings: listening to the voice in the word, creating the conditions so that we can all compose our own melody, so that we can feel the music that makes us really what we are” (KOHAN, 2019, p. 132).

Given these premises, we agree with Rocha (2020) regarding the transformative force of affect in (educational) life. As already mentioned, affect, also ideologically charged, can both reduce and expand our potential for action in the world (ESPINOSA, 2008; MASSUMI, 2015). The hopeful lovingness (FREIRE, 2013, 2014) can be understood, in this context, as the life force and, therefore, the element that can make us experience our *radical interconnection* more potently (KEATING, 2007) with people, with the world, with life, thus proving to be a profoundly transformative energy.

We find on the theories of critical literacy, in its interface with affectivity, possibilities to recognize our contradictions and to continue expanding our perspectives by acting in/through language, in defense of an educational practice and a fairer world. Therefore, we continue to argue in favor of an alliance between criticality and affectivity as a possibility for the (re)construction of less oppressive (linguistic and educational) worlds and realities.

3. CRITICAL-AFFECTIVE LITERACY AS A DECOLONIAL RESOURCE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Language education guided by the close link between affect and criticality recognizes that critical literacy, if approached under rationalist bases, can respond in a very limited way to the urgencies and dramas of the contemporary world, because it erases the way we are affectively constituted in the midst of our relationships and their effects (ANWARUDDIN, 2016). The affective and multisensory nature of our experiences is fundamental to the construction of our ways of understanding the world and of existing in it and, thus, critical reflection could not ignore the strength of affectivity in our lives.

Espinosa (2008) understands affect as the power to be affected and to affect people and the world around us. Massumi (2015) emphasizes the transversal nature of affect, since affectivity is related to the *intensity* of feelings and emotions, and cannot be reduced to fixed categories or characterized in a dualistic way as something objective or subjective. In this horizon, emotions are effects of how we experience affect.

Therefore, affect implies *engagement* and refers to the different ways in which we connect with each other and with the world. According to Massumi (2015), affective expressions, such as anger or fear, are powerful mainly because they have the power to interrupt the flow of meanings or the situation, undermining our power of action. It is important to point out that affect should not be judged in an objective and moralizing way, since an assessment situated on the type of potentiality linked to affect depends on the ethical orientation adopted (MASSUMI, 2015).

For Anwaruddin (2016), when we think about these premises, linked to the educational context, it is important to consider at least four basic principles for the experience of critical-affective literacy. First, it is crucial to reflect on what we feel and the reasons for experiencing certain emotions. In other words, it is desirable to exercise criticality in order to allow interpretive expansion (MONTE MÓR, 2018), also regarding the ways – always culturally, politically and ideologically constituted – in which we respond (affectively) to the world, as Massumi (2015) and Safatle (2020) remind us.

Secondly, it is important to reflect on how our feelings and attitudes may be causing suffering to someone, so that it is possible to renew our ways of feeling and thinking, in favor of a more communal, equitable and socio-cognitively fair sensitivity. In addition, it is essential to feed, in a critical and creative way, the constant questioning, in personal, community and global spheres (MONTE MÓR, 2018), to enable critical reflection on how affect has been constituted (or not) in policies of separation and silencing, allowing (or undermining) the reproduction of inequalities. Finally, it is necessary to link the experience of critical-affective literacy to the search for the reconstruction of (micro and macro) socially fairer and emancipatory policies.

We understand that the (pedagogical) proposal of critical-affective literacy is closely aligned with socio-educational practices guided by the idea of “feel-think” (ARAÚJO, 2017; TALLEI; DINIZ-PEREIRA; LIBERALI, 2022; WALSH, 2017). Feel-think practices, according to Araújo (2017), aim to critically stimulate cultural, political, and ideological reflections, based on open debate and interested in undermining any type of oppressive relationship, provoking rupture movements in the face of racism, xenophobia, sexism, among other traits that produce (epistemic) violence. According to this author:

[...] the feel-think theory germinates, through self-reflection, and creates an axis of communication between reason and the heart. This is responsible for nurturing the reason that is transformed into a feel-think thought, linked to the processes of existence of the subject who is inserted in this learning process (ARAÚJO, 2017, p. 73).

Thus, language education guided by critical-affective literacy, in seeking to respond to the urgencies of a society that experiences deep crises, aligns itself with the transformative proposal of decolonial feel-think. That is because, based on the “exchanges of knowledge and experiences”, this perspective on education seeks to rescue “the bonds of affection” towards the life stories of subaltern groups, provoking openings for alternative thinking (ARAÚJO, 2017, p. 73). For Menezes de Souza (2019, p. 7), “decolonial theories or southern epistemologies are theories against universality”, which call for the confrontation of racism, cultural discrimination, and other modes of subordination.

As Walsh (2013, p. 94) argues, it is essential that we face the imposition of capitalist and neoconservative reasonings in university contexts, because these are constitutive of a colonial project that normalizes “think-act”. For the author, this would be “acting without thinking”, which takes the university “and its critical and educational project to the precipice” (WALSH, 2013, p. 94). In this context, we understand that hegemonic forces end up undermining the possibilities of affect that expand our energy of struggle, weakening our belief in the possibility of rupture and subversion of *single stories* (ADICHIE, 2019).

For Adichie (2019), who defines herself as a storyteller, *single stories* are intrinsically linked to the structures of power in the world and, therefore, to the imposition of hierarchical relationships that authorize relations of subalternity. The author links this idea of power to the word *nkali*, in Igbo, which means “to be greater than another”, stressing that, “just like the economic and political world, stories are also defined” by this principle that, depending on issues of power, defines “how they are told, who tells them, when they are told and how many are told” (ADICHIE, 2019, p. 23). In this scenario, single stories impose the silencing of the subaltern, but do not prevent them from speaking (SPIVAK, 2021).

Consequently, we emphasize the potential of critical-affective literacy in promoting a “feel-think-act-pedagogize” interested in fighting against the most diverse forms of intolerance that prevail in our society (WALSH, 2013, p. 95). We argue in favor of critical-affective educational practices that feed and promote resistance movements:

[...] not to destroy, but to build. [...] an ethical, critical and dignified resistance against the authoritarianism of external and internal regimes of control and power, to defend the university (students, professors and employees, and the critical and plural thinking), proposing its participatory and democratic reconstruction from within (WALSH, 2013, p. 95).

According to Walsh (2013, p. 96), while the current forms of violence – “physical, gender-generic, sociocultural, epistemic and territorial” – terrify us, they also incite us towards insubordination. Thus, amid chaos, we believe it is possible to promote pedagogical practices that, germinated in our pain, can be powerful enough to undermine the system and allow us to sow it, hopefully, with other forms of existence, more plural and communal.

4. (RE)NARRATING CONFLICT AND AFFECT IN THE CLASSROOM: CRITICAL LITERACIES - CRITICAL FOR WHOM?

*We see ourselves in these stories.
Children who are unworthy of receiving the same affect, you know?²*

In this section, we present some proposals of the didactic sequence (DS) worked in an English language course offered to undergraduate students at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp). Initially, it is important to mention that we understand DS as “a set of school activities organized, in a systematic way, around an oral or written genre” (DOLZ; NOVERRAZ; SCHNEUWLY, 2004, p. 97), emphasizing that this is our take on this theory. In doing so, we validate the hybridization between the genres as we consider the multisemiotics that are already part of our students’ repertoire as also constitutive of the language practices fostered at school and university.

Starting from the memories of the professor of the discipline (one of the authors of this article) and the testimonies of some students, we reflect on the manifestations of discomfort and pain³ that emerged from the activities. From the teaching point of view, the explanation of these emotions had a destabilizing (and transformative) potential, as they imposed difficult but necessary questions: is there a limit to the critical load of literacies in pedagogical practices? To what extent do our critical literacy-oriented choices reverberate in our students’ emotions? Ultimately, literacy is critical for whom?

These and many other questions have permeated our teaching practice (and certainly that of many other teachers) since we found ourselves physically isolated and politically and emotionally helpless in face of not only the devastating force of the virus, but also the destructive power of a necropolitics (MBEMBE, 2016), which normalizes death and (dis)governs education (LIBERALI, 2020). In the case of a country constituted by abyssal inequalities, the pandemic accentuated differences, also giving greater visibility to serious issues of digital access faced by economically disadvantaged groups.

In addition to all the deprivations imposed by remote teaching, perhaps the most significant was the impossibility of sharing laughter, stories and affective experiences face-to-face with our students, fundamental threads in the fabric of a classroom understood as a place of intimacy and feeling, as Hooks (2017) teaches us. From June 2020 until the present moment, we have experienced different types of distancing due to many challenging situations, such as: many students are unable to do didactic activities due to lack of financial support, in addition to having to deal with new (and difficult) study environment settings; teachers feel exhausted in the face of the need to reinvent their own practices and the feeling of responsibility for the impacts of their students’ learning, to mention just a few difficulties.

² Excerpt from the testimony of Eduarda (fictitious name), a student from the English Language II class who participated in the DS discussed in this section. We use fictitious names to preserve student privacy.

³ We understand that pain and discomfort are emotions that, according to Rezende (2020, p. 8), should be understood as an expression of “political and social resistance”, as it will be clear from the discussion of the statements below.

It was, then, in search of finding connections between all of us that, in the first semester of the remote learning period, one of the authors of this article found in literature a way to travel between fiction and reality in order to build, through language education, moments of pause to rethink the world through the lens of art and foster reflexivity and criticism. From this perspective, we understand that “literature has the power to metamorphoses itself into all discursive forms”, which means that working with literary texts also implies the mobilization of different literacies in the additional language (COSSON, 2020, p. 17).

Since then, DSs lasting 3 weeks each and based on a literary tale⁴ have been part of the proposals for the English Language classes taught by this professor at Unicamp. This proposal, involving a set of DSs, was also present in the first semester of 2021, in the English Language II course, regularly offered at Unicamp as an undergraduate course (it may be either mandatory or elective⁵ depending on the students’ course curriculum). There were 22 students signed up for the class, most of them majoring in History. In the remote learning context, activities were divided between synchronous (online meetings via Google Meet every Monday, from 2pm to 4pm) and asynchronous (activities developed via Moodle). The synchronous meetings were aimed at the practice of orality and general discussions, while the reading proposals were carried out virtually from written/multimodal texts.

The short story selected for the DS worked on in this course was “Sweetness” (2015)⁶, by the American writer Toni Morrison. The justification for choosing this text was its central theme: the rejection of a black daughter narrated in the first person by a “light-skinned” mother. Throughout the narrative, the mother seeks to justify her feelings of refusal and lack of love for her daughter, explaining that everything she did was to protect her from the evils of the world. Thus, the feeling of guilt seems to overflow, at all times, in the mother’s narrative⁷.

Therefore, questions about motherhood and childhood also intersect the narrative, but the racial debate prevails throughout the text. This point was decisive for the choice of the short story, since from the beginning of the course the students were engaged in social debates and expressed enthusiasm in knowing that, at the end of the semester, another literary production by a black author, the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, would be discussed in the course. In addition, the tale can be read as a personal testimony, in which the use of the Simple Past, which was the grammar topic⁸ studied until that moment, prevails. Thus, the DS seemed to integrate a favorable contextual framework for working with linguistic-discursive issues and for debating the themes evoked by the text. However, the ways students dealt with these themes and activities were marked by conflict, pain and discomfort, as we will discuss later.

Below, we present some activities that integrated the DS. The development of the proposals was based on the four dimensions of the pedagogy of multiliteracies, defined by Cope and Kalantzis (2013) as situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice.

We will also discuss activities related to situated practice, overt instruction, and criticality. We understand that this is a possible way of carrying out and analyzing the educational process, because, as Cope and Kalantzis (2013, p. 127) emphasize, these movements “are not a sequence to be followed”, in a rigid way, but moments of pedagogy practice in which “teachers can access their different repertoires”.

⁴ In the first semester of 2020, the literature project focused on the short story “A Private Experience” (2009), by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; in the second semester of 2020, the short story selected was “Happy Endings” (1983), by Margaret Atwood.

⁵ Students majoring in History, Languages and Literature, Linguistics and Literary Studies at Unicamp must complete mandatory credits in additional language courses (German, Spanish, French, English or Italian) at the university. For those who choose English, the English Language II course is mandatory; for others, it is elective or extracurricular.

⁶ “Sweetness” is a chapter taken from the novel “God Help the Child” (2015), by Toni Morrison, having been published as a stand-alone text (or a short story) in the 02/09/2015 edition of “The New Yorker”. It is available at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/sweetness-2>.

⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the tale, we suggest reading the following article: <http://www.aescotilha.com.br/literatura/ponto-virgula/deus-ajude-essa-crianca-toni-morrison-resenha/>.

⁸ The course syllabus can be consulted at the following link: <https://www.dac.unicamp.br/sistemas/catalogos/grad/catalogo2022/disciplinas/la.html#disc-la212>.

The proposals discussed below were done asynchronously via Moodle.

Figure 1 - Contextualizing the language and themes of the tale.

Source: prepared by Kawachi (2022).

Figure 2 - Expanding the contextualization focusing on racial themes.

Source: crafted by Kawachi (2022).

The objective of the activities was to familiarize students with the language and themes of the text through small excerpts. The expectation with the first activity (Figure 1) was to focus linguistic knowledge (in terms of morphological categories), in order to promote understanding of specific parts of the text (marked by the theme of guilt). The second activity (Figure 2) illustrates a proposal that starts from socio-discursive categories to assess the understanding of vocabulary related to racial issues, using excerpts from the story as context. In both cases, students are introduced to practices of conceptualization that refer to both the “overt instruction” and “situated practice” dimensions, as they create opportunities to experience the known and the new (COPE; KALANTZIS, 2013).

More than providing opportunities for working with metalanguage, the activities invite the student to access their emotions by thinking about the theme of activity 1 and reflecting on the meanings of words and their links with the racial issue, which emerges from excerpts of activity 2. Therefore, these are also processes traversed by critical literacy because “criticality is established as associations are constructed in a procedural way (...), also guided by affectivities that place each individual in a continuum of relationships that are procedurally and infinitely constructed (...)” (JORDÃO, 2019, p. 74).

In a similar way, the next activity maintained the intention of promoting reflections on linguistic aspects linked to the main themes of the story.

Figure 3 - Critically analyzing the language of the short story.

Take a look at the following excerpts from the short story and answer the questions:

1. *Ain't nobody in my family anywhere near that color. Tar is the closest I can think of, yet her hair don't go with the skin*

2. *She don't call or visit anymore. She sends me money and stuff every now and then, but I ain't seen her in I don't know how long.*

a) What can you say about the language she uses? Do you see traces of her identity?

b) Do you think that her grammar choices (mistakes) say something about her? Explain.

Source: prepared by Kawachi (2022).

Notwithstanding that the two questions in this activity focus on the use of the English language in the main character's speech, it is not a metalinguistic conceptualization: what we want to assess here is the extent to which the student is able to mobilize linguistic-discursive resources to understand marks of identity in the character's language, in order to broaden their view of what these marks represent about that woman's identity. There is, therefore, an overlap between the dimensions "overt instruction" and "critical framing" of the multiliteracies pedagogy, since both a conceptual and an analytical view are required to carry out the proposal.

In this way, when questioning what would be "standard language" and what this means in terms of identity, the activity goes back to the critical literacy premise of "critically interrogating the status quo, enabling people to understand and transform their own historical and social places in society" (DUBOC; FERRAZ, 2018, p. 239).

Supported by Leander and Bolt (2013), who revisit multiliteracies from the perspective of affectivity, Jordão (2019, p. 72) reinforces the argument that "literacy involves practices full of 'affective intensity' (JORDÃO, 2019, p. 26)" because, in the exercise of the pedagogical practice of/with language, "what comes through 'are not preexisting surface characteristics or grammars – but the force and affect created by a text, an action, an idea' (JORDÃO, 2019, p. 37)".

In this horizon, the activities were developed based on the perspective of multiliteracies, aligned with affectivity and criticality. We have not lost sight of the initial premises of this theorization that refer to the diversity of modality and media, as well as to cultural and linguistic diversity. Even so, the focus on the critical and affective dimensions of literacies was predominant because, again according to Jordão (2019, p. 73), we conceive "critical literacy as a practice constituted by emotions".

It is worth noting that the activities could have been enriched by the intersection with multisemiotic resources that could enhance the construction of meanings in a more diversified way, stimulating student productions beyond the written modality, as proclaimed by the theories of multiliteracies. However, we understand that the proposals acted as a trigger for very relevant reflections, allowing the understanding that critical literacy does not occur in the materiality of the text, but also in experiencing the feelings and emotions aroused in this process of interaction with the text, as discussed moving forward.

After the activities were made available, the professor was contacted by some students who sought to explain the painful feelings they experienced while reading the story. In addition, the discussions in the synchronous classes with other students and the answers of several students in the asynchronous activities already signaled that DS had caused discomfort, leading to the questions presented at the beginning of this section.

As per the professor's request, these students sent testimonies narrating how they felt while reading the story. As the excerpts discussed below illustrate⁹, the Freirean exercise of reading ourselves while reading

⁹ All students consented to the use of their testimonies in this work.

the other (DUBOC; FERRAZ, 2018) must also be extended to us, teachers, as we look at our choices. Thus, we propose here to exercise our critical self-reflexivity (TAKAKI, 2021) of reading ourselves (teachers) while reading the other (students); to rethink our choices while reflecting on the students' pains aroused by the selection of the text and the triggers present there.

The perception that DS had caused discomfort in some students revealed the need to accept the contradictions that are inherent to an education process that aims to be critical and, therefore, to assume that "teaching is a dynamic arena of conflicts" (TAKAKI, 2021, p. 637). Thus, experiencing self-reflexivity, we ask ourselves: how do we react when we, teachers, are driven by our students to experience critical literacy?

With no intention whatsoever of offering ready answers to sometimes intangible questions, it seems to us that one way to deal with conflicts is to welcome our vulnerabilities and engage in a corporified listening process that is in line with Keating's idea of radical interconnection (2007). In this line of thought, critical and non-hegemonic educational practices include the recognition of our deep connection with other people, with elements present in the world and with life in its broadest sense. Keating (2007) also draws attention to the importance of listening carefully, in a deeply interested way, to the other. Thus, Keating (2007) encourages us to *listen with our bodies*, so that we can promote significant transformations in the educational spaces we occupy.

It is with this view and this way of listening that we discuss excerpts from the testimonies of three students. Respecting the individualities of each one of them, they are analyzed from three points of convergence: feelings about the context and structural racism; feelings aroused by reading the short story "Sweetness"; and suggestions/referrals from students for future activities.

Table 1 - Feelings about the context and structural racism.

Eduarda	Marcos	Raquel
<p>I've been thinking about racial issues for a long time and it's all very painful. (...)</p> <p>So seeing how this construction of lack of affect, of pain and oppression, of a place of importance as something that comes from so long ago, in addition to being very sad, makes us think that everything was made to be exactly like this, it won't change and we are not going to leave where we are.</p>	<p>The week I read the story Sweetness was the same week that there was the massacre in the Jacarezinho community in Rio de Janeiro (which left me very shaken), so it was a very troubled week. In addition, being a young black peripheral person puts you in contexts that provide the feeling of sadness, hatred and revolt against the violence imposed on us by structural racism along with the current economic model, being a black person in Brazil is constantly being placed in uncomfortable situations.</p>	<p>Being black at a university like Unicamp is not easy, especially when you come from a poor background. The fact is that institutional racism is there and you must have a lot of emotional support to be able to handle it, which we don't have. It's a trigger all the time, all the time we're having to talk about race and positioning ourselves. (...) But there are times when I just wish I didn't have to talk about anything, because it's tiring and it hurts. It's like picking at the wound all the time.</p>

Source: prepared by Kawachi (2022).

The three testimonies overflow a potency of painful feelings that, despite having been awakened by the reading of the story, go back to a social context that precedes the experience of reading. This conjuncture continually undermines the "happy affect" of the black population (among other oppressed/minoritarian groups) to triumph in the realization of "a strategically perverse plan, which moves a micropolitics of sad affect (such as: frustration, hatred, envy, anguish, fear)" (ROCHA, 2020, p. 118). The allusion to structural or *institutional racism*, as discussed by Almeida (2019), in addition to the mention of the educational context of the

university, leads these students to the painful experiences of *lack of affection* and hopelessness as they are led to believe *that everything has been done to be exactly like this, it won't change and we won't leave where we are*.

These excerpts point out the need to never lose sight of the scenario in which a text will be received by our students. As Keating (2007, p. 38) emphasizes,

Opening myself completely, I listen. I observe each person as he/she speaks. I read the body language of my students: the shrugged shoulders, the retracted chin, the averted gazes. I listen with my body, allowing feelings and words to penetrate deeply into me.

What also emerges from the words of these students is the urgency of collectively building curricula and educational practices guided by the decolonial sensibility of *feel-think*. It is important to strengthen the experience of the transformative practice through critical-affective literacy, aiming to provide experiences that favor critical and hopeful reflection about the emotions that permeate the educational context.

Likewise, in a critical self-reflexivity perspective, we now understand that a discussion on the themes of the short story could have been proposed *before* its availability, so that, from the beginning, a path to active and embodied listening would be open. Thus, we agree with Takaki (2021, p. 636) who is guided by Freire to defend that “the political, cultural and social forces that influence the context from in which our interpretations are constructed need to be questioned and re-signified permanently”. This questioning can (should!) be a process built jointly between professors, students, and other possible participants in the educational practice. Even so, as in the case discussed here, in which the professor is always open to dialogue and advocates for more horizontal relationships, tensions still can and will certainly occur. The objective, then, is not to erase or silence discomfort, but to understand, in a collective and questioning way, the forces that sustain it, so that we can think politically and strategically about actions capable of re-signifying it, in favor of a more equitable and egalitarian society.

Table 2 - Feelings aroused by reading the short story “Sweetness”.

Eduarda	Marcos	Raquel
<p>We see each other in these stories. Children who are unworthy of receiving the same affect, you know? (...) racism is here and we live it. Reading this story made me angry and painful and, as always, reminded me where they want us to be. It was a harrowing text that generated that lack of hope, you know? Seems like nothing will change...</p>	<p>After analyzing the story, I had many triggers. Reading about a black family where the mother disowns the daughter was a very impactful experience and it strongly brought up many of these feelings, and having to produce a work with all this latent reality was something really difficult.</p>	<p>Reading the story was difficult because, in addition to being heavy (...) it was in a context that I was already fed up and exhausted. Sometimes I get tired of being a black person and I just wanted to be a person. That sounds weird and looks like self-hatred, but that's not it. We are proud of blackness, but most of the contacts that force us to have with it are painful.</p>

Source: prepared by Kawachi (2022).

In addition to the *distressing, heavy and difficult experience* narrated by the students due to the triggers awakened during the reading, the feeling of *hopelessness* generated from this activity seems to stand out. As Raquel explains, *the contacts that force us to have with it [the blackness] are painful*. Revisiting our own teaching practices is never an easy task; it is even more complex to recognize that an activity has motivated emotions in such a negative way. In this regard, more than regretting, we exercise our critical self-reflexivity by sympathizing with

the feelings of these students and now we understand that exposure to conflict does not seem to be enough for transformation. It is evident that in addition to questioning the power relations that promote inequalities and that sustain the context of institutionalized racism and oppression, the practice of critical-affective literacy must also promote hope (in the Freirean sense).

It would also have been important to associate the reading of the story with another proposal in which joyful affect could be experienced more strongly, as suggested by the students themselves (see Chart 3). This would create a space for us, students and professors, to hope critically and jointly. And we do it because, going back to Freire (2014), hope is an ontological necessity: we hope because we exist.

Table 3 - Suggestions/referrals from students for future practices.

Eduarda	Marcos	Raquel
<p>I appreciate the concern. Perhaps you can think about bringing in texts that demonstrate black agency. Texts of empowerment, struggle, culture, art, African heritage. Sometimes what we need is to see ourselves in other ways. We don't want to be remembered for the pain we carry.</p>	<p>(...) the work is very interesting, as well as the professor's proposal to bring writers who are not part of the hegemonic elite that exists in literature, the project of the activity itself was well thought out. Perhaps for the next class, it will be interesting to address works that deal with social issues, but that together with this, awaken feelings in students beyond negative feelings, as these are already part of our daily lives.</p>	<p>I understood your intention, I talked about it on WhatsApp. But if you wanted to guide racial discussions, why do it in a negative way? It would have been really cool if you had picked up any other black production that wasn't about experiences of suffering. I think that's it, thanks for caring.</p>

Source: prepared by Kawachi (2022).

The three excerpts confirm the need not to restrict the racial debate to *experiences of suffering, the pain we carry and negative feelings*. We endorse the students' criticisms and assess that the emotional burden of critical literacy becomes too heavy (or unsustainable) when we leave out, as we did in the proposed activities, opportunities for the construction of criticism also from a place of hope. In this horizon, a multiliterate, hopeful and affectively critical practice implies the feedback of didactic movements (situated practice, overt instruction and transformed practice), in order to glimpse possible transformations. Only then will the educational practice be committed to the realization of the unprecedented feasible (FREIRE, 2014; LIBERALI, 2020). Echoing Liberali and Megale (2019, p. 69), the educational practice guided by the multiliteracy meaning provides an opportunity for the unprecedented feasible, as it encourages us to "go beyond the limiting situations imposed by reality, from solutions that are possible, although still not idealized or conceived". In other words, it is important to listen with our bodies, so that we can re-signify our affect and renew possibilities to announce other realities, while denouncing oppressive hate speech and silencing.

We also highlight, in these excerpts, the sensitive way in which the students open up to dialogue and assume the position of educators, teaching even when they are *exhausted* and knowing that they would certainly like *not to have to talk about anything, because it is tiring and hurts*. Why, then, did they overcome the exhaustion of the situation and were willing to dialogue?

Perhaps because changes are possible due to the recognition that we need to build alliances, guided by Freire's love. These alliances can be strong enough to face the weight of coloniality that crosses and sustains authoritarian discourses of the most varied orders, in a markedly anti-democratic and oppressive society. Despite having thanked the professor for the concern to understand their anxieties, we, educators, must thank

them for their attitudes, for their engagement to a listening policy that, despite the pain, rescues and returns the feeling and affect to the space of the classroom, and by the speeches revealing a power of great concern, empathy and care for the other.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this article, we circumscribe the discussion on educational practices of a critical and transformative nature in a pandemic society facing a civilizational crisis. In this context, emphasizing its decolonial tone, we continue to defend critical-affective literacy as a powerful resource to fight against discourses of intolerance, as well as to nurture a posture of resistance and hope in the context of language education today.

The analysis of a proposal for teaching English at the university showed the urgency of an active and corporified listening practice which is horizontal and deeply open to the pain of the other, so that it might be possible to promote pedagogical practices of feel-think, capable of facing the universalist logic, which aims at silencing, disqualifying and destroying economically disadvantaged groups and people who do not conform to the hegemonically imposed standards.

In a chaotic scenario, like the contemporary one, we hope that the reading of this text can be potentially inspiring and capable of involving us in a process of reflection and expansion of perspectives. May our voices be united in the cry that denounces oppression and that, at the same time, feeds the transformative energy that allows us to announce alternative modes of existence and educational experience. Alongside all the people who courageously resist the overwhelming effects of a perverse social and economic system, may we continue to fight for a (language) education process guided by Freirean principles and, thus, freely constituted as a socially emancipatory space of equality, of empathic solidarity, of subversive love and, above all, of life, in all its potential.

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