

When we launched the call for this special issue of *Signum: Estudos da Linguagem*, we pointed out that in recent years Brazilian society has been experiencing major challenges in education. Some of these challenges can be traced back to government policies and the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the midst of uncertainty and conflict, language teaching researchers have positioned themselves in favor of critical education in order to try and overcome institutional limitations. Language studies have been advancing in this direction, with the strengthening of transdisciplinary approaches that seek to build understandings about what language teaching is and how teacher education can be (re)conceptualized from educational realities and demands. Our premise was that more politically responsible Applied Linguistics research creates spaces for dialogue with and commitment to socially engaged language education.

In fact, the historical moment we live in, while bringing hope for advances in the educational field, also invites us to be cautious, understanding the fragility of the achievements. “You have to be attentive and strong”, warns the artist. After all, we have witnessed positions that go against the grain of criticism that is always necessary for those who educate themselves to transform an unfair and unequal world. For this very reason, it is increasingly urgent to carry out projects that strengthen actors in the educational field so that, conceiving language as a social practice, they contribute to citizenship education, sensitive to differences, but committed to understanding how they are produced and how dehumanizing hierarchies can be overcome.

Our call was answered by authors who dialogue with this possibility. In the article “Ethics in linguistic education: colonial seeds, decolonial flowers”, Egido and Furtoso report on a doctoral research project, carried out by the first author under the guidance of the second, whose original focus was the elaboration of a draft of a code of ethics written for Brazilian language teachers. The project, initially conceived to elaborate such a draft in the light of some ethical perspectives of European origins, over the course of the data generation with the research participants, showed that the European-centered worldviews would not adequately address the struggles and needs of Brazilian language teachers. Two instances of colonial seeds that became decolonial flowers are then introduced. The article brings to light important issues such as, for example, the high competitiveness that characterizes the academic world and ends with reflective questions to be answered in a local and creative way by scholars and teachers in the field of language education.

Beyond the rationality that marginalizes the emotions and subjectivities produced in the school environment, two texts deal with affection and love. Ana Maria Ferreira Barcelos reviews some international studies that focused on the concept of love in education from a critical perspective. In a first moment, the author outlines an overview of the current crisis in which we find ourselves, and which makes talking about love even more important. Then, she discusses six studies that investigated the concept of love within the critical approach (in the North American context). The author concludes by suggesting reflections and implications for practice and summarizing the main elements of a critical approach to revolutionary love for teacher training and language teaching and learning.

In “Critical literacy and affect in contemporary language education: reflections on educational proposals at the university”, Guilherme Jotto Kawachi, Cláudia Hilsdorf Rocha and Ruberval Franco Maciel 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. To do so, they discuss the challenges of survival in dark times, marked by the destructive power of a virus and the equally devastating force of necropolitics, which are felt in various spheres of society, with significant impacts on contemporary language education. Taking into account the described scenario, the authors present

a didactic sequence worked in an English language course with university students, which starts from a literary text to discuss racism, affectivity and (lack of) hope. Therefore, they point to critical possibilities in a scenario of uncertainties.

Practical issues more directly linked to the classroom are dealt within the article “Text production as a form of expression and collaboration: reflections on a writing project in initial classes of German as an additional language”, which focuses on collaboration in the writing approached in a critical-reflexive way, allowing individual expression. The article, authored by Marcell Aquino, presents a reflection on the teaching and learning of German as an additional language (GAL) through written production projects. The proposal was developed with students from a beginners’ course at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) during emergency teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and the results highlighted the importance of collaborative production activities with a critical lens, as a means to enable individual expression in GAL. The text production and pair revision process allowed a greater understanding of the students’ needs, not only regarding language knowledge, but also a space for collaboration and support. The experience with written production projects emphasizes relevant issues within contextualized social practices, allowing a space for interaction and greater involvement in the individual process of learning GAL in a critical-reflective environment.

A context that has been approached more frequently by researchers in Applied Linguistics is the teaching of English to children, the subject of two texts, which deal with principles for this teaching and an overview of studies. The challenge of dealing with criticism at this stage of schooling is discussed in the article “Teaching English to children up to the age of six: reports on South America and Brazil”. In it, different realities about English teaching practices for children up to 6 years old are presented, with examples from different parts of South America, and Brazilian states. It is understood that, because they have common characteristics, the countries (also states and cities) involved in the study can organize themselves in a support network, sharing their achievements and challenges. Fernanda Seidel Bortolotti and Cibele Krause-Lemke consider that, due to the lack of offer and studies on this subject, it is necessary to approach language teaching for children of other age groups. The knowledge gap reinforces the need to discuss the theme and the bias of the results, which point to the private education network as the central scenario for this practice, and brings to light the relevance of implementing public policies for the democratization of access as a part of a critical agenda in teaching English.

On the other hand, the article “A view of language as social practice: principles for teaching additional languages to children” brings a set of principles to plan proposals in additional languages for children: a) engagement in childhood-related social practices; and b) building up the repertoire to be employed in the social practice in focus. Such principles are in line with the concepts of additional language and repertoire and aim to reorganize the way of conceiving and planning language teaching in and for childhood.

Finally, Rayssa Mesquita and Júlia Raposo Larré deal with a perspective that has been gaining strength due to its ability to provoke changes in the way we conceive language. In “Translanguaging in higher education: towards a critical language education that values the student’s voice”, the authors discuss the discursive functionality of translanguaging in the context of university students studying Portuguese as an Additional Language in the Portuguese Flagship Program at the University of Georgia (UGA/ USA). The data are part of a doctoral research and were collected through a critical-collaborative methodology. Data analysis points out that translanguaging is a relevant pedagogical resource, playing an important role in complex and interdependent areas of the student’s life, namely: social, academic, linguistic and personal areas.

This issue ends with a review of the work, in Portuguese, “*Educação linguística em línguas estrangeiras*”, published by Pontes Editores in 2018. Ana Paula de Lima and Patrícia Helena da Silva Costa consider that the collection, in addition to problematizing the sense of criticality and multiliteracies, brings accounts of experiences in different educational contexts, emphasizing the importance and feasibility of such practices in schools and in language teacher education.

With this hopeful tone, the texts offered here provoke reflections on how researchers in the field of Applied Linguistics have sought to appropriate critical perspectives in teaching and teacher education. There is sensitivity to human relationships mediated by language and the need to build sensitive and engaged subjectivities in addressing social issues as a possibility of confronting setbacks.

We hope that the reading of this issue will encourage other contributions to a much needed critical language teaching-learning agenda in the Brazilian context.

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