

Pedagogical practices and teacher autonomy in the context of elite bilingual education*

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Abstract

In this article, some answers are suggested about how the autonomy of teachers in an elite bilingual context is perceived in their voices, through analyzes of what they say about their pedagogical practices. The problem that gave rise to the research fell on the varied higher education of teachers who were not trained to work with levels of early childhood education and early grades; in some cases, they did not even have a licentiate degree. This “space” between initial training and pedagogical practices shed light on issues concerning teacher autonomy. The methodological approach was recommended by qualitative research, using a written questionnaire and a discussion group as instruments for data generation. The reflections were based on the following authors: García (2009), Benson (1997), Benson and Huang (2008), Cunha (2007), Pesce (2012), Tardif (2002) and Megale (2020). We understand that, although teachers do not recognize autonomy in their practices, nor use this word in their speeches, it is through the choices they make to mobilize the teaching and learning process that they exercise their protagonism and empower themselves in the exercise of the profession. It is concluded that what evidences their autonomy seems to be the decisions they make to adapt their practices to what the management of school expects, to what the Guidance Manuals indicate, and to what the teacher’s book predicts, while looking for a practice that proves to be effective, even in the absence of the control imposed by the institution.

Keywords

Pedagogical practices – Teacher autonomy – Elite bilingual education – Teacher work and training.

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Introduction

In this article, we intend to investigate the relationship that is established between pedagogical practices and the autonomy of teachers who work in the elite bilingual context. Theoretical production regarding this context is still scarce, as the increase in the number of institutions that offer this type of education in Brazil is recent. However, we indicate that the elite bilingual context is only the background for our discussion and, therefore, the theoretical path we have taken does not specifically discuss it. The balance of productions carried out indicated, however, that the scenario that deals with the work and teacher training of teachers working in bilingual schools lacks more research that would help us understand the potential of this context and, even, tangent discussions about the new teaching professionalism, considering that it takes place in the daily practices of teachers and is legitimized in and through them.

In this sense, we intend to contribute to a better understanding of this teaching modality, bringing teachers' perceptions about their teaching practices with regard to the strategies and resources they use, in order to answer the guiding question: how does the autonomy of teachers in a context bilingual teaching make itself perceived in their voices when they talk about the challenges in their pedagogical practices?

The article is organized into four main parts: we start with the theoretical path, where we indicate that the voices that shed light on the analysis of pedagogical practices are from García (2009), Benson (1997), Benson and Huang (2008), Cunha (2007), Pesce (2012), Tardif (2002) and Megale (2020). Then, we place the reader in the methodological path we took to generate the data. In the third section, we present the analyzes in which the voices of the teachers appear. Finally, the final considerations close our discussion.

Theoretical path

In this theoretical path, we will follow a trajectory that starts from a small overview of the elite bilingual context in Brazil, and then we delve into the theoretical issues that touch the focus of our analysis: pedagogical practices and teacher autonomy in that context.

The number of schools that offer the bilingual education modality has increased as the market trend advances in the country, which bets on this modality for the mastery of a language other than the native language. This trend is possibly linked to the advent of network technologies that pulverize physical borders and connect people from different parts of the world. There is an understanding that Brazil is not a monolingual country (CAVALCANTI, 1999); however, the context of prestige (MEGALE; LIBERALI, 2016) seems to mobilize new research that is concerned with the nuances that permeate language education, bearing in mind that we live in a context of superdiversity (VERTOVEC, 2007).

To learn to speak an additional language, it is extremely common to resort to schools specializing in the teaching of that language. At the same time, private schools started to establish partnerships with language institutes, opening their space for students to study English, in an outsourced way, after school hours. Today, however, it is already possible to find private institutions that offer the option of bilingual education so that students do not have to move to another place or outsource. Marcelino (2009) states that

schools that offer bilingual education intend to combine the offer of formal education with the offer of language teaching.

However, he argues that the bilingual proposal goes beyond what a specialized course offers, while:

In the bilingual school, the English language is a vehicle, the means through which the child also develops, acquires and builds knowledge and interacts and acts on the environment. The bilingual school should always be seen essentially as a school, with school goals, focused on education, not as an augmented language institute. (MARCELINO, 2009, p. 10).

Bilingual education can also be an instrument for empowering subjects when it comes to the use of language in their social practices. For Baker (2001, p. 183), bilingual education as an isolated concept is “a component in the midst of a larger social, economic, cultural, political and educational context”. Furthermore, Rocha (2019) retrieves in Garcia and Li Wei (2014) the concept of languaging to distance itself from an idea of language as static sets of rules, postulating that it is in the midst of language practices and social interactions that “[...] we become who we are when we interact and produce meanings, in a tense and ideologically oriented way, in today’s world” (ROCHA, 2019, p. 19). We understand that, in general, the most important thing is that bilingual education promotes access to languages of power. And this can be transformative, taking into account that, in addition to promoting access to them, it can legitimize other bilingual practices, including minority languages, in order to promote economic, political and social equality. García (2009), when thinking of contemporary society as being multilingual, states that it is possible for bilingual education to be used as a project, as it enables communication with the international community.

For this reason, the core of the discussion proposed in this article is the Pedagogy of bilingual education (GARCÍA, 2009), as we understand Pedagogy as a comprehensive term at the heart of which is the teaching work. For García (2009), teachers who work in bilingual education often follow what is set. But, other times, these teachers create, contest, change and transform the policies and practices that are in place as they promote their pedagogy. The author suggests that pedagogical practices largely depend on the sociocultural context in which they take place and on the place where the school is located and asserts that the Pedagogy of bilingual education is an art. As such, it can be well performed by experienced teachers, as well as it can fail (GARCÍA, 2009).

In this regard, we understand pedagogical practices as being “the description of the teacher’s daily life in the construction and execution of his teaching” (CUNHA, 2007, p. 105). They involve issues that go beyond what happens when the teacher is in the classroom, as they are the result of training or lack of training, planning or the absence of it, autonomy or its absence. Basically, pedagogical practices take place in the midst of factors that influence the teacher’s work in some way and it is through these actions that we realize that the teacher’s autonomy is strongly manifested in the face of the choices he makes, especially if we consider it as the ability to govern themselves by their own means.

Martins (2002, p. 208) explains that “the theme of autonomy appears in the academic literature, in some cases, linked to the idea of social participation, and, in others, linked to the idea of expanding political participation in terms of decentralization and deconcentration of power”. According to Benson and Huang (2008), historically, the literature on autonomy relates the concept of student autonomy with the concept of additional language teacher autonomy because the discussion about teacher autonomy began with a focus on student autonomy in “non-traditional” learning environments. The authors resume analyzes made on autonomy in the 1970s and 1980s, stating that the concept served to designate not only autonomous learning, but also the ability of the learner to take charge of his own process, since the notions of language acquisition are returned to the idea that learning an additional language also depended on a certain degree of student autonomy outside the classroom. They also claim that autonomy is an individual attribute of the teacher, developed over the course of their trajectory from being a professional in training to an active teacher, and that their experience as an additional language learner can make them more or less favorable or able to develop this capacity with their students. Thus, we emphasize that, although the bilingual teacher is not an additional language teacher, his trajectory in relation to autonomy can develop in a similar way.

Geraldi (2016, p. 117) discusses the relationship between the self and the other that would characterize the discussion on autonomy, making it relative. For this author:

Autonomy makes reference to the “I” and the “other” despite the apparent sense of referring only to the subject himself, as his faculty or his choice. [...] This means that autonomy, like freedom, has an existence that is always relative to others who surround us, but who, in a democratic society, do not restrict us. Nobody is autonomous, period. We are all autonomous in relation to others and in certain actions that we practice.

This “other” can refer not only to another person, but to other concepts that Geraldi (2016) explains that influence them through mediation: society and how knowledge circulates within it; the cultural heritage that can dictate disciplinary directions. To these two concepts, we add ideological control in the multisynoptic era, in which many observe many (PINHEIRO, 2014). Benson (1997) further argues that most language teachers work under conditions in which their control is severely restricted by factors such as educational policies and institutional conventions. This is in line with what is proposed by Geraldi (2016) about no one being “autonomous and period”, since autonomy is constituted as relative when mediated by so many other factors.

In the meantime, Martins (2002) argues that the education movement that places the student at the center of the teaching and learning process transforms the relationship between teachers and students, as the former becomes an advisor. Thus, we suggest that this is another factor influencing teacher autonomy. In this discussion, Benson and Huang (2008) make an interesting counterpoint. For the authors, the trend that involves placing the student at the center may reflect a lack of trust in teaching professionalism on the part of the school administration. In this way, it is necessary to consider that the

epistemic-methodological movement that places the student in a central role can favor the emergence of a market niche that offers ready-made recipes in which the teacher plays a role of executor of steps or quality controller, the that would inevitably erase part of its importance in the teaching and learning process.

The same niches can be used to propagate an idea of quality standardization in education through the sale and use of ready-made teaching materials and bilingual projects. Thus, the teacher's book could fulfill the role of an instruction manual, such as those that guide the application of a teaching methodology in a language institute, for example. By saying what to say, do, show, etc., he ensures that the contents may be addressed effectively, and even in a homogenized way, by beginners or experienced teachers. It can also limit the possibilities of developing an investigative posture or problematization in relation to the practices they develop, while they do not need to mobilize reflections on what they do. For all these reasons, we reiterate: student-centeredness should not presuppose the erasure of the teacher, nor should the opposite be true.

Unlike the old autonomous learning centers that assumed a “non-presence” of the teacher, in the bilingual context, we realize that he is often seen as a facilitator of interaction between students in the classroom. For Megale (2020), the role of the facilitator would not be synonymous with reducing teaching to verbalization, but with intentionally producing learning through a set of knowledge that is not learned spontaneously. On the one hand, we suggest that if “facilitating” were reduced to verbalization, it would approach technical autonomy, if we think of the technician with a bias of “training the student with the skills [...] he needs to manage his learning” (PESCE, 2012, p. 117). In this case, teaching would have an apolitical character. However, what happens in the bilingual context is more than that.

Thus, it seems possible to say that autonomy, in said context, could contribute to a possibility of teachers' choices when it comes to their positions in the institutions where they work, since, according to Cunha (2007), the mere fact that the teacher is responsible, inevitably, by directing their daily life in the classroom, reinforces the fact that there is no neutrality in their practices. For the author, even if the teaching action is naive, or not very reflexive, it still highlights the values of the teacher and is, to a greater or lesser extent, political (CUNHA, 2007).

It is also important to emphasize that, for Martins (2002), desire is the fuel of action, and it can be absent when autonomous participation is restricted by norms. From this perspective, we infer that the role of the bilingual teacher's pedagogical practices would be to promote student/knowledge and student/student mediation, and not just to transmit knowledge. In this case, autonomy is fundamental, as teachers choose their paths to promote these mediations even in the midst of diverse forces.

However, when mentioning the mediation between student and knowledge, we remember that in the bilingual context there is still no single political-educational discourse, a standardized way or a curriculum that indicates how to work with content. The approach can take place through subjects, or through projects, and it is relevant to speculate whether this requires teachers to have knowledge that goes beyond the metalanguage of the additional language, the particular socializations of each subject or

even knowledge about language acquisition. After all, using the additional language as a vehicle for content (MARCELINO, 2009) may require an interdisciplinary stance on the part of the teacher.

These approaches lead us to the question of method, which is closely related to teacher's autonomy, since the paths that the teacher chooses to mobilize teaching and learning pass through him. We understand that the discussion about what would be the most effective method to teach an additional language has been going on for a long time and, according to what García (2009) postulates regarding the use of multiple approaches in education, we understand that there is no perfect approach that serve all purposes; consequently, there is no clear set of methods and techniques³.

Another important aspect to consider is that, among the factors that influence the teachers' teaching, is the historical moment that we are experiencing, characterized by the post-method (KUMARAVADIVELU, 1994). For Kumaravadivelu (1994), teacher autonomy is linked to the recognition of their potential to know not only how to teach, but also to act within educational policies, conventions and norms. Encouraging the development of a reflective approach to their own pedagogical practice, analyzing it, evaluating it, and monitoring its effects can empower language teachers to be able to theorize their practices and practice what they theorize.

However, the movement between the instructions and recipes used a few years ago and the post-method condition is quite dynamic. The past can be a starting point in an anthropophagic sense. It can be a catapult or it can be a welcoming place for teachers, depending on the context in which they are inserted. Before delving into the perceptions derived from the teachers' voices, we will place the reader in the methodological path that enabled the generation of our data.

Methodological path

The concern that gave rise to this research came from an informal conversation with an English teacher who had recently started teaching in a bilingual context. The challenges of that new reality, experienced and reported by her in an informal conversation with friends, made our minds bubble and gave us input for the development of the research. This was then carried out in a private school, located in the north of the state of Santa Catarina, in a city with well-defined industrial characteristics and with a population of less than 200,000 inhabitants. To participate in bilingual education classes, students' parents needed to make a differentiated investment; that is, not all school students participated in these classes. The bilingual education program took place after school hours, lasting two hours, from Monday to Friday. The teaching staff of the bilingual program offered by the institution after school hours was composed of nine teachers, six of whom accepted to be part of the research.⁴

3- We emphasize that we understand "methods" and "techniques" as distinct concepts. We are aware that they are not synonymous. In this clipping, however, both point to pedagogical practices, which is what interests us.

4- Schools and characters mentioned here have names omitted and/or changed to preserve identities and institutions. The project that gave rise to the information analyzed was approved in July 2019 by the Ethics Committee of the university where the research was developed. The report number is 3.353.870.

We understand that our analysis would need to be developed qualitatively. Gatti and André (2010, p. 30) state that the so-called qualitative research

[...] came to constitute an investigative modality that was consolidated to respond to the challenge of understanding the formative/forming aspects of the human, its relationships and cultural constructions, in its group, community or personal dimensions. This type of research came with the proposition of breaking the protective circle that separates the researched and the researcher, a separation that was guaranteed by a rigid method and by the clear definition of an object, a condition in which the researcher assumes the position of 'scientist', of the one who know, and the researched become data [...] in a position of impersonality. From a new perspective, we start to advocate non-neutrality, contextual integration and the understanding of meanings in historical-relational dynamics.

Considering our interest in what the teachers had to say, their best practices and their anxieties, and also considering our investigation questions, a quantitative approach would most likely not help us get where we would like to go. Although, initially, we delimited a route of data generation, we realized, along our trajectory, that we would need to welcome dialectical movements characteristic of qualitative approaches. In this regard, Lüdke (2009, p. 34) asserts that, in qualitative research, "there are always accidents along the way and the very evolution of the work offers suggestions and raises new questions". In fact, we found the verisimilitude of this thought when we started to interact with the participants. Although we had idealized the research, the research itself showed us, little by little, which paths we should follow to achieve our goals.

The first stage of data generation took place in July 2019, through a written questionnaire delivered to the teachers at school, designed to define their profiles. Although written questionnaires are widely used in quantitative research, for Triviños (1987), although neutral, they can be useful to identify general traits of a group, and can come to life when viewed in the light of some theory. The results of this first moment indicated the complexity of the context with which we were beginning to deal: the teachers were relatively beginners in the teaching career, and their higher education was diverse: two were graduated in Letters (double degree); one in Administration; another in Foreign Trade; the fifth participant was studying History; and the last one had a degree in Letters, but studied in the United States.

The initial results generated by the questionnaire indicated that the participating teachers had between one and five years of experience in the bilingual context. Three of them had started their teaching careers in the researched school for less than two years; the other three had already taught at language institutes and had been teaching at the researched school for more than two years. Of these, one had worked with English language for children in a multigrade school in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul and the other two had experience with English language for Elementary School 1 and 2. At that time, the teachers worked with early childhood education classes (preschool 1 and 2) and initial grades of Elementary School (1st to 6th year). None of them had training in Pedagogy. All responses were organized in a spreadsheet for easy viewing.

We therefore decided to conduct the second moment of data generation in a discussion group format in order to delve deeper into that context. In September 2019, we gathered the participants for the meeting. Weller (2006) indicates that a group like this can be used as a method of investigation because it allows, through access to the positions of the participating subjects, the possibility of getting to know a set of collective guidelines shared by them. The first question we asked to start the discussion between them was: "What are the biggest difficulties that you perceive in the daily life of bilingual education?". The exchange of experiences took place very smoothly, with the professionals talking about the beginning of their experiences in this context, talking about how they felt and telling about their practices. As they spoke, they made inferences from their colleagues' statements; they aired their opinions and even asked each other questions. The experience allowed for great exchanges between the teachers, so that we could see that, even working together, they felt insecure about some of their practices, and that moment of exchange of ideas was significant because they realized that the anguish of one was also the anguish of the other. The audio of the meeting was recorded using two cell phones, and the generated file was used for transcription, carried out by the researchers themselves.

Both the movement of organization in the spreadsheet and the movement of transcription were essential for us to appropriate what they wrote and what they said, because, in the transcription, especially the speeches of the discussion group, we had the first encounter with some traces of the regularities that, later, gave substance to the analysis. The selection of regularities was made considering what was most recurrent in their speeches. Some of them, like the use of the teacher's book that we will see below, were pronounced countless times by professionals. Others, such as the traits of autonomy, were identified by silences, tones of confession, and by what was not said. It was in the movement of transcriptions that we were able to distance ourselves from the context and understand what had become clear and what could still be explored a little more in relation to their testimonies. Therefore, in December of the same year, one of the teachers agreed to participate in a recurring individual interview to clarify some questions. About the recurring individual interview, for Silva and Davis (2016 p. 41):

It is increasingly evident that, for the apprehension of the meanings, in this case, the meanings of the teaching activity, the diversity of methodological instruments presents itself as a demand, because interpreting the word with meaning in its most different prisms, aspects and conjunctures makes it possible to that the speech is said from multiple places and points of view, a quality that can enrich the entire analysis process.

Considering that teachers are involved in a context in which they work with so many nuances involving language, culture and social practices, they are also constantly exposed to a multiplicity of discourses that make up these nuances and, possibly, constitute their practices. For all these reasons, once we have all the data in hand, we chose to analyze the teachers' speeches as a discourse that is socially produced, whose manifestation in the teachers' statements materialized their beliefs, their valuations and their collective constructions.

In March 2020, we sought access to the school's Political Pedagogical Project (PPP), but instead, the coordination provided us with two Guidance Manuals (Orientation Manual 01 and Orientation Manual 03) that gave some guidelines to the faculty on how the bilingual program should happen in the institution⁵. It was not clear whether there was, in fact, a PPP. These manuals offered great scope for discussions on the role of the teacher in the institution and on the bilingual context itself. Therefore, we used both Manual 01 and Manual 03, crossing them with the voices of the teachers, so that the regularities of analysis were illuminated and it was possible to reach our results.

In the next section, we will discuss the evidence that suggests the close relationship between autonomy and pedagogical practices. We chose, therefore, to divide the discussion of the results into two sub-items in order to work on a duality between two regularities that were more strongly present in our data, with regard to pedagogical practice: the conflicts between autonomy and the manuals that guide the bilingual in the institution and the way in which teachers mobilize resources and strategies in their teaching activities. In the two sections that follow, we hope to be able to explain the nuances that we perceive in relation to this duality when we bring to the reader the teachers' statements, obtained through the instruments used; the documents we use; and the mobilized theoretical framework.

Teacher autonomy in the context of bilingual education

First, it is relevant to mention that the word autonomy does not appear in the voices of the teachers. However, we noticed that it manifests itself without the teachers realizing it. For Cunha (2007, p. 59), "the important thing is to understand the meaning that the subject gives to his words [...] in saying and in silence, using the word with meanings specific to its context".

In Guidance Manual 01, made available by the school, the word autonomy appears when the text deals with the 1998 National Curriculum Parameters and when it addresses the Four Pillars of Education:

Learning to be: main concept that integrates the other three previous ones. It is considered that *education should contribute to the total development of the individual* – physical abilities, reasoning, sensitivity, aesthetic sense, memory, ability to communicate, etc. The aim is to develop the personality as best as possible and be able to act with an increasing capacity for autonomy, discernment and personal responsibility. (ORIENTATION MANUAL 01, [201-], p. 5, author's emphasis).

In this case, autonomy belongs to the student, not the teacher. This makes sense considering the trend discussed that proposes to place the student at the center, which can also be seen in Guidance Manual 03 ([201-], p. 11, emphasis added):

Regarding active learning, it is said that students should communicate more than the teacher, obviously observing the limitations of each age group. They should also help to configure the

5- The justification given by the Coordination regarding the impossibility of accessing the PPP was related to the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and the virtualization of classes. Management was unable to help us at that time.

results in relation to content, language and learning skills, in addition to evaluating their progress in achieving these results and encouraging joint work, *negotiating the meaning of language and content* with other students, having, thus, the teacher as a *facilitator*.

When the Manual mentions negotiating the meaning of language and content, we understand that it may be in line with the second version of autonomy by Benson (1997), called psychological. In this context, we understand that there is a certain autonomous protagonism, or empowerment, when teacher Lulu writes in response to the written questionnaire that “within the programmatic content established by the material, I define methods and objectives”, as well as other teachers also express themselves in this regard:

I see the content of the week in the course material, I choose what is most relevant; the planning is done weekly, but during the week it is necessary to change it.

Perhaps the teachers are not within the scope of what could be considered a historically constructed critical autonomy (BENSON, 1997), which reflects on the interests of social groups at the moment, because their work, in this context, is not intended to show the student the conflicts and contradictions present in the dominant ideology in the current historical moment of their lives. Perhaps, also, because it is mostly about early childhood education for children from a privileged social stratum, they find themselves dealing with conflicts and challenges that, in their daily perceptions, are more urgent than an in-depth reflection on the transformation of their realities.

When the teachers mention planning, it is possible to infer that control over what will be developed in the week is important for them in their role. Even so, we can discuss it to illustrate the relationship between their pedagogical practices and autonomy. In the written questionnaire, we specifically ask: *Describe how you plan your lessons*. Of the six responses, we highlight four that can be observed below:

Lulu: Within the syllabus established by the material, I define methods and objectives and look for extra activities to facilitate the assessment of students' understanding of the content.

Angie: I divide it between structure, visual examples, activities with games and games, videos, written exercises... It all depends on what I want to teach and what goals I have with them.

Pamela: I see in the course material the content of the week, I choose what is most pertinent (since it is not possible to go through all the content described due to time).

Clara: Planning is done weekly, but during the week it is necessary to change it.

From the statements above, we understand the autonomy present when the teachers mention that they define their own methods, goals and objectives. It is also present when Pamela says that she chooses what is most pertinent due to the relationship between content and time. She bears a strong imprint of her protagonism, as she decides to select the parts of

the curriculum that she thinks are most relevant to her students. At the top of her selection of contents due to time, Pamela goes, in a way, to what is proposed by Gimeno Sacristán (2000) when she states that treating the curriculum as something given is to consider it indisputable. Without realizing it, she turns her resume into something debatable.

Clara's statement that the weekly planning is necessarily changeable, serves as an indication that they must be attentive and respond quickly to the challenges that arise in everyday life, in order to change the course according to their actions and reflections. However, from their speeches, we perceive that the material establishes the syllabus that must be worked on and, each in its own way, transforms them into something engaging for the students.

If, on the one hand, there are choices that try to go beyond the proposed course material, on the other hand, we highlight the following answer taken from the written questionnaire, which appeared when the teacher gave her testimony in relation to points that she felt could be strengthened in her practice:

Lulu: Always looking to innovate, to be able to do different things in 2 hours a day of class and that doesn't interfere or delay the base material.

Here, we realize that this teacher privileges the base material to the detriment of innovation and different things, even though she recognizes the need to innovate in her classes. Regarding innovation and also the playful and different aspect of classes, the strong need to involve and motivate students in pedagogical practices, using play at all times, can be justified as arising from the need for engagement to promote learning, in a perspective that would meet what is proposed by Vygotsky (2003, p. 298), who values that "one can only learn with one's own legs and with one's own falls" and that this principle "can also be applied to all aspects of education". However, we cannot ignore the market that places the private school in the market logic of student retention with a view to maintaining numbers and revenue. In other words: if the practices are not engaging and do not give "results", the students will have no reason to continue studying in that institution and the parents will look for another one that meets their expectations. In view of this, we question: if classes in the bilingual context took place in the final years of Elementary School, would the need for innovation at all times remain? Furthermore, what is the role of the teacher in this scenario? What voice is given to the teacher?

Indeed, unlike Pamela's selection, Lulu chose not to interfere. Therefore, we understand that she innovates, as long as innovation does not delay her schedule. For all these reasons, we affirm that they seem to have autonomy in relation to pedagogical practices. We suggest that such autonomy be acquired in an asynchronous and individual way, and that it is revealed little by little, in an unordered way, through the teachers' individual experiences. It seems reasonable to say that the adaptations, changes and creations corroborate what García (2009) proposes when he says that the teacher who works in the bilingual context must know multiple possibilities. What the teachers tell us, apparently, confirms the author's assertion that it is the teachers who implement bilingual

education, although the directions for the context almost always come from somewhere other than the classroom (GARCÍA, 2009).

In that manner, we realized that their choices in relation to what they should teach can be an indication of the exercise of autonomy and can also give clues about the overlapping forces that influence their pedagogical practices. We wonder if, without the existence of the course material (mentioned by Pamela) and the Manuals (even the planning ones), and considering the different formations (not directed towards working with children, nor towards teaching, in some cases), the teachers would be able to handle the complexity of their daily lives. In any case, we propose that the teachers' statements can indicate the historical moment in which we live, in which there is a rupture between content and post-method. Each of them seeks paths that seem most pertinent to the way they read their worlds based on their experiences and theoretical affiliations.

With that, we end the section in which we discuss the relationship between teaching autonomy and pedagogical practices, deduced from an analytical path that took place considering the Guidance Manuals, the way in which teachers value planning and their choices in the daily life of the profession. In the next section, we will continue the discussion on the pedagogical practices that take place in the context of bilingual education, permeated by the relationship between teacher autonomy, students and content, but specifically focusing on the role of the teacher's book, another available resource.

Resources and strategies for pedagogical practices: teacher's book and contents

In the bilingual program in question, the teachers claim to work, after school hours, the same contents that the students study in the curriculum, but in a playful way. This impression that teachers have may not be fully assertive, because, when working on content, their expectations in the bilingual and the expectations of teachers of other subjects are not the same. Even though the contents covered are part of the curricular matrix, the approach they give to them is not the same as what a teacher in a specific area of knowledge would give, especially because the additional language is used as a means of instruction.

Surprisingly, in the analysis, it seems possible to say that the way of contextualizing learning and creating meaning is defined by the teachers in order to make students learn the contents they are working on in the additional language, and not the language itself. In fact, their speeches suggest that their concern is, in fact, whether the students are doing well in relation to the contents, and not necessarily the normalized use of the additional language. Therefore, they try to vary their strategies. According to a speech by Lulu, during the Discussion Group:

[...] that's exactly why every class has to be very different, and every approach has to be different because one student will get it, another student will get it with a song, another student will get the same content explaining it alone, another will be able to catch it in a group, another will be able to catch it in the game, another one, you know.

Therefore, we realize that, in the pedagogical practices of the teachers, they exercise their autonomy in the search for techniques that make their strategies effective so that the students “get” the contents.

The need to “handle the content” seems to be another aspect that determines the way in which their pedagogical practices take place. In Clara’s speech, during the Discussion Group:

[...] so you do it once to see if it’s cool, then you try another way, like my fourth grade for example like, right, we have a lot... a lot to do [change tone of voice, as if saying something forbidden] you have to deal with a lot of subject and project and finally it’s... lately, I haven’t been able to be very playful, but you know, they know that the moment to pay attention, the moment for me to speak, nobody speaks with me because it’s time for them to understand how things work, you know, and I can see a lot of production so yeah, I think that’s really it, it depends on the class, you know the class, you know how you can do it.

Clara makes sort of a synthesis of what we are discussing. First, she mentions the anxiety about the schedule and how it influences the playfulness and innovation that she should look for in her classes. She does so in a confessional tone, indicating that, in a way, she sees the need to circumvent the orientation of being playful in order to follow the textbook, which suggests what she considers most important (the content). Talking about her also reveals the negotiated power relationship that exists when she takes control of the class: “when I speak, no one talks to me because it is the moment for them to understand how things work”. It is not clear what she meant by “the things”, however, we understand that it could be both the content and the additional language itself. Finally, she indicates the importance of the teacher’s role when she says that “you know the class, you know how you can do it” in an affirmation that she feels confident enough to trace her own path in her pedagogical action, even if it means to follow in a different way from what was instructed – in this case, without the playfulness recommended by the Manuals, which apparently causes blame. Yet, when she says that the moment of seriousness is the moment for “they understand how things work”, Clara indicates a dichotomy between the objective of seriousness and the objective of playfulness, as if, with the latter, it was no less possible to understand the functioning of the issues. Would this be the autonomy of the post-method that bumps into more content orientations?

Continuing, it is in the book that the teachers find the contents they need to work with. In the written questionnaire, Lulu writes: “The bilingual book already has a step-by-step guide for each lesson and based on it, projects, activities and even videos are created that will make the classes more dynamic and interesting”. This feature also appears when we ask them about their planning. Clara writes: “[...] We use the teacher’s book, which tells us what to say, do, show, etc.”. On the other hand, even using this resource, the teachers assume the responsibility of bringing life and dynamism to the classes due to the need to use play at all times, as evidenced in their answers to the written questionnaire:

Dora: According to the book (content) I try to combine playful, creative experiences with a socio-environmental focus. Children learn more when they have fun.

Eduarda: The bilingual book already has a step-by-step guide for each lesson and based on it, projects, activities and even videos are created that will make the classes more dynamic and interesting.

Pamela: [...] I try to carry out activities that are close to their daily lives and in the most playful way possible.

We realize, then, that the teacher's book can perform two distinct and contradictory functions: insofar as it is used by teachers as an instrument that helps them to think about their classes, it also causes anguish with regard to what they need to accomplish. At the same time that, in a way, it "saves" the teachers, it also puts pressure on them. The statements of Dora and Eduarda corroborate his central role in their practices. Its implication seems to be a kind of manual, with the role of regulating the quality of teaching. In this way, we perceive that the teachers perform their role in a powerful way when they make decisions regarding the use, non-use or adaptation of the instructions that the teacher's book brings, in addition to the selection of the contents made by one of them, already discussed in the previous section.

In such a complex context, the teacher's book is a central resource in their practices and can represent the point where method and post-method converge. It can also represent the bridge between what teachers need or should do and what they actually do. It is relevant to consider that, in view of their diverse higher education, some not even focused on teaching (Administration and Foreign Trade), we could question the teachers' choices due to the distance from the textbook, since they could not have clarity about the conceptions that lead them to get her. In this sense, Tardif (2002) helps us to think that experiential knowledge, essentially heterogeneous, intrinsic to the daily life of the profession and not systematized in theories, are also relevant when it comes to pedagogical practices. In addition, the same author explains that the knowledge of theory is not invalidated by practice, nor is it more important than it. For him, there is a feedback process as teachers constitute their knowledge in the classroom. Therefore, everything they learn in their training is not invalidated, quite the contrary (TARDIF, 2002). Tardif (2002) states that what is learned in theory is re-signified in practice. In other words, even without training for such a context, pedagogical practices and asynchronously developed autonomy are valuable and can even guide discussions on teacher training for this teaching modality.

The aspects discussed in these two sections reveal themselves as lifeboats for teachers who arrive to work in the context with their different initial trainings. The way in which the aspects appeared in the teachers' speech led us to a perception that teaching autonomy exists, even in the absence of specific training for the bilingual. Considering that these teachers are not formally prepared to work with children in English (or even to work with children), there is a game between what the institution expects them to do in their practices and what they want to do because they think it is more appropriate when analyze their interaction with students. Looking at their autonomy can indicate paths and potentialities, and it seems to be in the pedagogical action that the answers reside.

Therefore, it is not only in what is done, in itself, but in what is in-between the proposed and the achievable.

We end this section by indicating that we have made inferences about the role of the teacher's book, planning and teachers' choices with regard to their pedagogical practices. In the next section, we will address our last considerations regarding teaching action and the autonomy of the teacher who works in the context of bilingual education.

Finishing conclusions

We noticed that the teachers in the bilingual teaching context live their daily lives intensely and use the available resources within what is expected of them and the objectives they must fulfill. Here we seek to attribute meaning to what they live and to the way they deal with the challenges that arise daily.

In view of what we discussed, we reiterate that, even if the Manuals do not bring the autonomy of teachers as a priority, there is a protagonism on their part that is revealed by the choices they make regarding their pedagogical practices. Although the curriculum and contents are determined, and the institution defines how they should carry out their practices, their role is revealed as they choose to follow or not the guidelines given by the school.

Their decision-making in the quest to adapt their action to what the teacher's book recommends and what the management asks for are what evidence their presence as bilingual teachers, and not as additional language instructors. Even among the forces that influence their practices, teachers place themselves as protagonists in their daily lives. We could see that this transgression does not happen in a vacuum. It is the result of teachers' perceptions of what works or not with their classes. Therefore, we realize that there is autonomy of the teachers to decide which way to go to reach the expectations of the institution.

We emphasize that, despite each of the teachers having a different initial higher education, and none of them having been formally prepared for the context in which they work, their pedagogical practices happen and can be significant. Their choices should not be devalued, much less their protagonism should be erased by the absence of specific training for the context in question. On the contrary: their teaching activities developed in the midst of so many apparently unfavorable forces should be praised and their trajectories of daily conquests deserve attention and analysis.

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