

**THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH: A MATTER OF INCLUSION
AND DIVERSITY**

***O ENSINO E A APRENDIZAGEM DA LÍNGUA INGLESA: UMA QUESTÃO DE
INCLUSÃO E DIVERSIDADE***

***ENSEÑANZA Y APRENDIZAJE DE LA LENGUA INGLESA: UNA CUESTIÓN DE
INCLUSIÓN Y DIVERSIDAD***



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ABSTRACT: This essay proposes to reflect on the teaching and learning of the English language, considering this process as a matter of inclusion and diversity. Therefore, it resorts to official documents, such as National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (Brasil, 1996), National Common Curricular Base (Brasil, 2018), and the United Nations report (ONU, 2013) on social inclusion and the rights of people with disabilities in Brazil. For that purpose, this paper is outlined based on two lines of inclusion: 1. At a macro level, the political perspective, which understands the linguistic education in the English language as a way to guarantee participation in social life, and in this perspective, how actions have been implemented by the State, through public policies, for the general public and educational policies, and 2. at a micro level, the diversity perspective, to think about what can be done to teach the English language. The relevance of this study lies in the possibility of contributing to teachers' awareness of inclusion linked with the English language teaching and learning setting.

KEYWORDS: Education. Inclusion. Diversity. Teaching. English language.

RESUMO: *Este ensaio propõe refletir sobre o ensino e a aprendizagem da língua inglesa, considerando esse processo também como uma questão de inclusão e diversidade. Para tanto, recorre a documentos oficiais, como a Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da educação nacional (Brasil, 1996), a Base Nacional Comum Curricular (Brasil, 2018) e o relatório da Organizações das Nações Unidas (ONU, 2013), sobre inclusão social e os direitos das pessoas com deficiência no Brasil. A reflexão está delineada com base em duas linhas de inclusão: 1. Em um nível macro, a perspectiva política, que compreende a educação linguística em língua inglesa como uma forma de garantir a participação na vida social. Nesse sentido, analisa-se como ações têm sido implementadas pelo Estado, a partir de políticas públicas para o público em geral e de políticas educacionais; e 2. Em um nível micro, a perspectiva da diversidade, que busca pensar sobre o que pode ser feito para ensinar a língua inglesa. A relevância dessa reflexão reside na possibilidade de contribuir para a conscientização dos professores sobre a temática da inclusão, vinculada ao contexto de ensino-aprendizagem da língua inglesa.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação. Inclusão. Diversidade. Ensino. Língua inglesa.

RESUMEN: *Este ensayo se propone reflexionar sobre la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa, considerando este proceso también como una cuestión de inclusión y diversidad. Para ello, utiliza documentos oficiales como la Ley de Directrices y Bases de la Educación Nacional (Brasil, 1996), la Base Curricular Común Nacional (Brasil, 2018) y el informe de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas (ONU, 2013), sobre la inclusión social y los derechos de las personas con discapacidad en Brasil. La reflexión se basa en dos líneas de inclusión: 1. a nivel macro, la perspectiva política, que entiende la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa como una forma de garantizar la participación en la vida social, y en este sentido, cómo se han implementado acciones por parte del Estado, basadas en políticas públicas, para el público en general y políticas educativas, y 2. a nivel micro, la perspectiva de la diversidad, pensando en lo que se puede hacer para enseñar la lengua inglesa. La relevancia de esta reflexión radica en la posibilidad de contribuir a la concientización docente sobre la problemática de la inclusión vinculada al contexto de enseñanza-aprendizaje del idioma inglés.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación. Inclusión. Diversidad. Enseñanza. Lengua inglesa.

Introduction

This essay aims to address language education in English, considering this process as a matter of inclusion and diversity. Learning another language is a contemporary demand on the global stage. Migratory processes, the internationalization of knowledge, academic exchange, the multinationalization of companies, and the breaking down of geographical barriers - which enables contact between people through Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICT) and the internet - have required knowledge of more than one language in order to participate in actions that are carried out in other languages. In this context, the English language has played a central role in the relationships in which these events take place, which can be explained in the light of its geopolitics².

The saying goes that universal understanding is still a long way off. However, searching for a language(gem) everyone can understand is constant (Rocha; Roth, 2000). From this perspective, the English language, configured as a commodity, has become a communication necessity for thousands of people, rather than just a language of cultural identity (Kumaravadivelu, 2005). In this way, the manifest power that this language has achieved has allowed it to emerge as a language of access to services and expression of ways of being, acting and thinking, articulating actions in contexts where it can operate as a lingua franca, that is, when used as a language of contact by people from different cultural backgrounds (Cogo, 2012) who do not share the same mother tongue.

However, caution is needed, because although English has become the world's lingua franca, chosen for international communication, a critical eye is needed on the part of the language educator, since it may be being approached not only as the language of globalization, but also of coloniality (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). For this reason, education, when thought of within the world of globalization, acquires a certain centrality as the great challenge to be solved worldwide (Monte Mór, 2012), because although globalization leads to the establishment of new global patterns of wealth, it also generates patterns of social exclusion (Graddol, 2006). The production of material and intellectual goods is practiced in society in such a way that the few can consume items such as watches, cars, rare wines, and expensive perfumes (Leffa, 2007).

² For more details on the geopolitics of English see LACOSTE, Y.; RAJAGOPALAN, K. (ed.). **The geopolitics of English**. São Paulo: Parábola, 2005.

Thus, the value of a product is proportional to its exclusivity, i.e. the more restricted it is, the higher the value, which points to exclusion. And the English language enters this list of exclusive goods, when the elite still believe they have this knowledge. This scenario, therefore, requires language educators to act more incisively to reflect on human rights. Along these lines, Graddol (2006) concludes that English has been at the service of a range of corporate roles and diverse identities around the world, and, as a result, the growing demand for employees with competence in this global language is not surprising. To a certain extent, this demand has also pushed various educational systems around the world, such as Brazil's, to include (or maintain) the teaching of this language in their curriculum, as a way of aligning themselves with contemporary perspectives. However, this reflection aims to go beyond these perspectives and consider others.

Therefore, in addition to thinking about language in theoretical and conceptual terms, and how this can enable inclusion and openness to diversity, especially for students with special needs, we need to continue thinking pragmatically about the teaching and learning of the English language for the inclusion of real learners. In this sense, we propose to reflect on inclusion from two perspectives: 1) **On a macro level**, the political perspective, which understands language education in English as a way of preparing and guaranteeing participation in social life, considering the expressiveness of this language on a global scale, which makes access to it and, therefore, learning it, a civil right. And how actions have been implemented by the state, from public policies, for the general public, and educational policies aimed specifically at the academic context; and 2) **On a micro level**, the perspective of diversity, thinking about how to help different individuals learn this language, considering their differences, diversity, and what can be done to teach the English language from this perspective.

Based on these two lines of reasoning, this essay proposes to reflect on inclusive education, taking as a reference the context of the English language classroom, taking into account the premise that the teaching and learning of this language is also a question of inclusion and respect for diversity, and that teachers may come across students with some special needs. In the following sections, these two perspectives on inclusion will be discussed using official documents that regulate and guide Brazilian education.

English language teaching and inclusion at the macro level

Stadler-Heer (2019) argues that the growth of publications relating inclusion to the English language classroom context, as well as the creation of a special study group on inclusive practices and special educational needs at the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL), indicate that 'inclusion' has become a key issue in the field. Thus, in line with the author, in this section, we will take the teaching of English as our starting point as a practice that should promote inclusion and respect for diversity. However, in order to do so, it is necessary to clarify which concept of inclusion and diversity we are referring to, as well as other concepts that are intertwined and the individuals we wish to contemplate with this reflection.

The notion of inclusion we adopt here takes learners with special needs as a parameter. Thus, we consider that to include is to insert, to aggregate, to make someone part of a group, which can only happen through actions with this intention. Inclusion thus refers to a set of actions that seek to ensure access to the benefits of life in society (health, education, employment, rights) for individuals who, for whatever reason, are disadvantaged by the system in force in society. In this way, the inclusion to which we refer, at the macro level, is aligned with the policies implemented by the state to ensure the right to social participation. With regard to diversity, we will consider the differences that people have, especially in relation to a disability, but also in their ways of speaking, thinking, and behaving.

Thus, from a macro-level perspective, the state is responsible for drawing up guidelines that instruct education systems to promote the provision of education as a civil right for all people. For a better understanding of this level, we need to classify these policies along two lines: public policies and educational policies.

With regard to public policies, according to a report drawn up by the United Nations (UN) in 2013, approximately 10% of the world's population, equivalent to 650 million people, were living with a disability at the time. Of this universe, almost 80% live in developing countries. This same report (UN, 2013) highlights that data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) showed that Brazil had 45.6 million people with some kind of disability, 23.91% of the national population, and warns that these Brazilians had been relegated to a secondary level in public policies and that they faced all kinds of challenges and prejudices with regard to accessibility, and even personal aspirations to be achieved in the areas of health, education and socio-productive inclusion. Based on this data, the UN has

recommended that Brazil expand the use of assistive technologies and communication accessibility (LIBRAS, audio description, dubbing, etc.), as these are essential criteria for democratizing access to information and the educational inclusion of people with disabilities.

With this in mind, Law No. 13,146 of July 6, 2015, which instituted the Brazilian Law for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities, was enacted to guarantee and promote the exercise of these people's rights on equal terms, with a view to social inclusion. According to this law, people with disabilities are those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments. This law also advocates that disability has a biopsychosocial character and takes into account four parameters: I - impairments in the functions and structures of the body; II - socio-environmental, psychological, and personal factors; III - limitation in the performance of activities; and IV - restriction of participation. Among these, in order to combat the restriction of social participation (Brasil, 2015), we consider the role of the teacher to be crucial in combating exclusion and discrimination, which we will return to in the next section.

Up to this point, we have been dealing with public policies. But about educational policies specifically, how have they also converged towards inclusion? Representing a breakthrough for Brazilian education, Law No. 9.394, of December 20, 1996, which establishes the guidelines for national education for special children, in its Art. 58, amended by Law No. 12.796, of April 4, 2013, established the guidelines for national education for special children, regulating that, for people with disabilities, global development disorders and high abilities or giftedness, school education should preferably be offered in the regular education network. The article even signals that specialized support services to meet the demands of special education would be made available, if necessary. However, we know that the implementation of this article in practice leaves much to be desired. Many schools still lack qualified professionals and specific professional support to deal with student diversity.

Still, in terms of educational policies, the Common National Curriculum Base (BNCC) (Brasil, 2018) recognizes that learning English enables the establishment of new forms of engagement and participation of students in the global world scenario, promoting a formative path of language education from a critical perspective:

Thus, the study of English can give everyone access to the linguistic knowledge needed for engagement and participation, contributing to students' critical agency and the exercise of active citizenship, as well as expanding the possibilities for interaction and mobility, opening up new paths for building knowledge and continuing studies (Brasil, 2018, p. 241, our translation).

As we have already said, the BNCC takes English as a lingua franca as a reference, which calls into question the supremacy of hegemonic versions of the English language, questioning the exclusive ownership of this language by these cultures. Thus, the BNCC considers and validates the different linguistic and cultural repertoires, therefore contemplating diversity. However, with regard to the BNCC guidelines, a few points need to be made. Firstly, despite the fact that the adoption of English as a lingua franca represents a significant advance in theoretical terms, in many contexts, English language teaching prevails with a native-based orientation, whose correction and appropriation are guided by the native speaker (Jenkins, 2012). This is why continuing teacher training and developing and improving (local) teaching materials must remain on the agenda. In this sense, it should be noted that Literature courses with a major in English may still have significant gaps that would make it possible to intervene not just peripherally, but directly in the inclusion of people with disabilities in schools (Medrado, 2016). Secondly, despite mentioning the term 'difference' in the English language section, the BNCC makes no reference, either in its introductory section or in the skills axes, to respecting the diversity of people with some kind of disability. What could be addressed, from the perspective of inclusion and exclusion, as a skill to be developed through the descriptors³ as, for example, is standardized for the history component, for the 6th, 7th, and 9th grades of elementary school. However, we cannot deny the existence of a passage that only opens the way to interpreting respect for differences when it comes to interculturality.

On the one hand, we understand that the inclusion of the inclusion agenda in the educational policy of the BNCC is a significant step forward. On the other hand, we believe that English language teachers need to know how to deal with differences. For this reason, specific guidelines for these teachers are necessary, which we will address in the next section, on the micro level, since these guidelines can converge to ratify the offer of the English language as a right, considering that education is a right for all, and would thus be able to contemplate diversity, when it comes to differences related to people with some social inclusion difficulty.

³ The BNCC establishes for the 9th grade, for example, for the history component, the development of the skill descriptor EFO9HI07: "identify and explain, in the midst of logics of **inclusion and exclusion**, the agendas of indigenous peoples, in the republican context (until 1964), and of Afro-descendant populations" (Brasil, 2018, p. 429, our translation).

English language teaching and inclusion at the micro level

The lack of qualifications of foreign language teachers is responsible for the self-exclusion of students (Leffa, 2007). We are still in times when quantity training is prized over quality. Many schools hire unprepared language teachers; they often allow teachers from other areas, such as the arts or the exact sciences, to take over the English language classroom to supplement their workload. Not only do these teachers lack the linguistic skills and theoretical and methodological knowledge to take on the classroom, but they also need more training to deal with differences. For this reason, the micro level of inclusion concerns the language educator's preparation to deal with differences. Along these lines, McCleary (2009) proposes thinking about inclusive foreign language education, questioning what adaptations, strategies, and pedagogical resources are needed to cater to the inclusion of people with special needs in the mainstream foreign language classroom, as well as the fact that the subject of inclusion should be part of foreign language teacher training.

In this way, the micro-level perspective is constituted in this sense, and it is essential that educators think about the provision of language teaching in pragmatic terms, in line with the diversity of a group of learners, to meet specific demands. In other words, different learners require different ways of internalizing knowledge. This, in turn, requires teachers to be prepared to deal with diversity, with students, for example, with autism spectrum disorder, low vision, walking difficulties, etc., which requires a more sensitive eye and more inclusive teaching practices that also take these learners into account. In this regard, McCleary (2009, p. 203) problematizes that:

Teachers already face a major challenge in adapting their classroom attention to the normal range of diversity that students present in mainstream classes: from levels of attention and preparation to levels of motivation and learning styles. In an inclusive classroom, in addition to this common diversity, there may also be students with low vision, motor or cognitive impairments, or deafness (McCleary, 2009, p. 203, our translation).

It turns out that teachers are not prepared to deal with diversity and, as a result, keeping students with special needs in ordinary classes, under the care of teachers without the appropriate training (McCleary, 2009), represents a huge paradox in the face of Brazilian educational laws and standards for inclusion policies. In order to meet these demands, teachers need to undergo training that takes into account this diversity, which will lead to inclusion.

Above all, teachers need to develop a sensitivity that enables them to understand that the teaching profession also requires giving oneself to individual and collective causes that require adaptations. In other words, teachers need to develop a kind of teaching spirit for inclusion, observing the specific needs of everyone and each one in particular. In order to make sense, the teaching profession needs to be responsive to the demands of learners, according to their differences. Any movement in the opposite direction will make room for exclusion. At this point, we think that exclusion is ultimately a process generated by discrimination. In other words, people are excluded because they are discriminated against for some reason.

Therefore, the school has an essential role in dealing with these inclusion issues. If certain social segments make inclusion impossible, it is the school that has the role of fighting to guarantee equal rights. It all starts at school. And from school, people reach out to society as a whole. That's why we also need to consider attitudinal issues, such as the way people act in the education system and in society in general, which oppress learners when they promote exclusion, especially of learners with special needs. The first step is for teachers to get to know the concept of inclusion in order to practice it. On this issue, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) points out that:

Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (UNESCO 2005, p. 13).

For the field of language education, specifically, in Stadler-Heer's (2019) view, the relevance of the concept of inclusion is already evident, as most basic education educators want to respond to the differences of learners. However, the author emphasizes that, to this end, teachers need to acquire new specific skills to diagnose, address, and monitor the different language learning difficulties that students with special needs have. But how can English language teachers act to promote a more inclusive context?

First of all, we need to consider the fact that almost all teachers don't know how to conduct their lessons in classes with students with different types of disabilities (Medrado, 2016). So, thinking about the demands and all the already theoretically-established policies, we now need to take action. You have to practice the theory. It is, therefore, crucial to prepare

teachers, and this should start as early as graduation. From this perspective, Medrado (2016) proposes training foreign language teachers to deal with the demands arising from differences:

This implies establishing teacher training that promotes concrete spaces for action, where disciplinary knowledge about specific content is linked to reflections on inclusion and, consequently, a professional ethic (Medrado, 2016, p. 264, our translation).

Thus, Medrado (2016) points out that promoting inclusion is also a professional, ethical issue, which requires language educators to take a responsible stance toward the other when, through real encounters with differences, they become aware of their differences. This researcher also points out that the teaching profession needs to be recognized as an eminently inclusive activity, considering that newly qualified teachers may encounter students with disabilities when they enter the classroom context.

For Stadler-Heer (2019), understanding the notion of inclusion requires a transformed view of language teaching. For this researcher, language teachers need to rethink the conventional concepts of individual differences that operate in schools, relating to all aspects of schooling, including building infrastructure, financial resources, the school community, and staff training. However, we mustn't lose sight of the fact that, in addition to these aspects, teachers need, as already mentioned, to develop a spirit of inclusion, a kind of conscience that pragmatically reaches their work. In other words, the teaching approach, the use of teaching resources, the teaching material itself, the format of activities, assessments, etc., need to take account of differences.

Take, for example, what Garcia and Tyler (2010) say about this issue when they consider that, depending on the specific areas affected by a lack of reading skills, learners can also experience enormous difficulty in decoding new vocabulary, retaining new information, and organizing ideas. That's why teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge, tools, and strategies to identify and understand these difficulties, which, although they are often perceived as abnormal, are, in fact, situated within the universe of differences.

Garcia and Tyler (2010) discuss the identification of instructional barriers to learning and present some guidelines. They argue that this verification, for both learning and assessment, begins when teachers identify the learning proposal's desired results and decide on the means they will use to assess this proposal. Therefore, they recommend that teachers review content and instructional approaches to recognize cognitive and linguistic demands. They also warn that specific content, texts, and strategies may not efficiently promote engagement in the

learning process, just as assessment methods can quickly become tests of proficiency rather than academic performance and thus fail to promote a real measurement of student learning. In this sense, to promote inclusion, Stadler-Heer (2019) recommends using games, drama techniques, and computer-assistive technology, which can promote the active involvement of all learners. The author also recommends projects, weekly plans, and learning cycles, which can facilitate learning among excellent readers.

In addition, we think that the teacher's attentive gaze, in the context of the language classroom, also needs to be introspective, i.e. the teacher needs to question whether they are speaking in the right tone and speed, whether they are using their mother tongue to mediate, whether the group dynamics correspond to the differences, whether the proposed activities and exams are taking diversity into account, etc. For this reason, some Brazilian schools, such as the Adventist College of Bahia, are already producing "adapted tests", with smaller textual questions, which aim to help learners with special needs understand the proposed questions, in the same amount of time for everyone, but taking into account the rhythms of each one. In the end, the goal is to consolidate a skill and learn a piece of content using different paths, not easier ones, but adapted ones.

Along these lines, in pragmatic terms, Norris (2019), based on his experience with English language teachers in basic education, proposes six elements to promote the inclusion of learners, which should be part of the English teacher's professional identity:

1. Recognize and value diversity;
2. Developing positive attitudes towards diversity;
3. Use teaching strategies that encourage inclusive education;
4. Involve parents, apprentices, and others;
5. Assess individual learners in different ways;
6. Support students in identifying, addressing, and evaluating learning goals based on reasonable adjustments.

Thus, Norris (2019) considers the teacher to be a key player in creating an inclusive teaching environment. To do this, she points out that the teacher needs to look at physical and material factors, such as whether all the students can see the board, whether they can access the teaching materials, or whether they can integrate physical and social activities. In this scenario, the teacher needs to develop and display positive attitudes to the diversity of learners, which can bring successful results in the educational process.

This concludes this brief discussion on inclusion in the English language classroom. Although this essay does not manage to cover all the categories of differences, it has set out to encourage reflection on inclusion so that it can leave the realm of problems and become a solution for thousands of people who are still on the margins of the educational process. The final considerations follow.

In conclusion, for now...

The central point of this reflection is to point out ways to contribute to the question: How can I be an inclusive English language teacher? Which will by no means be exhausted here. We agree that in no other curricular component is it so easy to exclude learners for various reasons, such as being a foreign language, which can intimidate; for ideological reasons, which can generate an inferiority complex in learners; or for accessibility reasons. That's why we've discussed essential points that can help us find answers to this question. Thus, we discuss public educational policies, the concept of inclusion, and how teachers can act to promote a more inclusive environment by, above all, developing a kind of spirit for inclusion. However, further training in the concepts, techniques, and strategies of inclusion is still needed. In this universe, at the linguistic level, the teacher must manage to include himself first, considering that the excluded does not include; therefore, the teacher needs to know the language he teaches in order to be included in the community of foreign language speakers, so that he can proceed to include his students.

It should also be pointed out that, while to a certain extent, the state has already done its part by fulfilling its role in drawing up policies for inclusion, now it's up to the teacher to do theirs too because students with differences are waiting for this treatment. However, the fact is that teachers need help to achieve an understanding of the differences and how they can meet learners' demands. This is not an easy task because inclusion policies are relatively new in Brazil, and there are complex differences. In other words, in the same classroom, teachers can come across students who are deaf, mute, have autism spectrum disorder, hyperactivity, etc. And for this reason, the teacher cannot be abandoned. In this sense, inclusion policies must also include practical teacher training. We need to invest in teacher training for inclusion.

Thus, an analysis of the panorama of inclusion in the regular educational context points to a dissonance between what official documents guide and standardize and what is done in practice. Who is to blame? If, on the one hand, teachers are not prepared or do not prepare

themselves, some element of this policy still needs to be added, on the other, despite all the public and educational policies, the results are still minimal, because the Law, the Educational Guidelines only ensure the liturgy of teaching, not effective learning, since there are no minimum guarantees of time and basic infrastructure for the student to be included and learn (Leffa, 2009).

In this sense, the area of inclusion and diversity is vast and still calls for new studies. Researchers can, for example, articulate research that involves how technological resources can help in the inclusion process, how teachers conduct their practices to include learners, considering their differences, and diversities, or even research how learners perceive inclusion in the educational context, focusing on the demands they have, and so many other issues to be researched, which can contribute to the improvement of a more inclusive education.

Returning to the question of how to be an inclusive teacher, the English language teacher needs to recognize that their goal is also to include the student in the community of English speakers/users. Despite its strong relationship with the phenomenon of globalization, we don't think that learning a language like English, in the face of its manifest expression, is merely due to this phenomenon. The teacher must be visionary in this sense and realize that the effort they make to include their students in the context of the English language classroom will converge to enable them to have access to new ways of being, acting, thinking, and behaving, which will contribute to the (re)formation of their own identities.

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