

Multiliteracies Practices at School: For a Responsive Education to Contemporaneity / *Práticas de multiletramentos na escola: por uma educação responsiva à contemporaneidade*

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ABSTRACT

Sharing with Rojo the assumption that Bakhtin's Circle philosophy of language owns the necessary lightness of thought and plasticity for the comprehension and analysis of contemporary multiliteracies practices, this paper aims, from a Bakhtinian perspective, at reflecting about the meanings of educating as a responsible act. Parting from the idea that a responsible education should not only be responsive for the multiple uses of languages that (re)design performances in our contemporary world, but also lead to the critical positioning about these uses, we relate some of the Circle's constructs such as ideology, dialogism, genre, hybridism, responsiveness, responsible act, etc. with the notion of teacher's knowledge, views of language constructed in the dialogues between Applied Linguistics and Cultural Studies and the pedagogy of multiliteracies proposed by the New London Group so as to think of educational processes that are responsive to contemporaneity.

KEYWORDS: Multiliteracies; Responsiveness; Responsible Act; Education

RESUMO

Compartilhando com Rojo a assunção de que a filosofia da linguagem do Círculo de Bakhtin está imbuída da leveza de pensamento e plasticidade necessárias para compreensão e análise das práticas de multiletramentos na contemporaneidade, este artigo propõe-se a refletir sobre os significados de educar como ato responsável. Partimos do pressuposto de que uma educação responsável deve, a um só tempo, ser responsiva aos usos das múltiplas linguagens que (re)desenham as performances na contemporaneidade e propiciar o posicionamento crítico sobre esses usos. Relacionamos, então, concepções do Círculo como ideologia, dialogismo, gênero, hibridismo, responsividade, ato responsável, entre outras, com concepções sobre saberes docentes, visões de língua e linguagem construídas nos atravessamentos entre a Linguística Aplicada e os Estudos Culturais e a pedagogia dos multiletramentos desenhada pelo Grupo de Nova Londres para pensar sobre processos de formação responsivos à contemporaneidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Multiletramentos; Responsividade; Ato responsável; Formação

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Introduction

Based on the conception that the language philosophy designed by the Bakhtin Circle owns the lightness of thought and plasticity demanded in the comprehension and analysis of multiliteracy practices in our contemporary world (ROJO, 2013), this article aims at reflecting, from a Bakhtinian perspective, about the meaning of educating as a responsible act. In order to do so, we revisit the problematic involving teacher knowledge and ethical responsibility in teacher education. Throughout this visit, the Circle's constructs such as ideology, dialogism, speech genre, hybridism, responsivity, responsible act, among others, as well as conceptions concerning teachers' knowledge, notions of language (re)designed by the transgressive view of Applied Linguistics (MOITA LOPES, 2006, 2010, 2013) and the multiliteracies pedagogy proposed by the New London Group (COPE; KALANTZIS et al., 2000) are called to discuss our understanding about being a teacher of discourses in our times.

We localize the discussion in the field of an Applied Linguistics targeted at developing studies directed towards processes of knowledge production and construction that give visibility to discursive issues affecting social life (MOITA LOPES, 2006) in a contemporaneity that, under the influence of an ongoing technological and media revolution, has been assuming unique and, quite often, diverse characteristics in relation to previous social formations. Summing it up, a globalized and network organized society that is marked by advances in studies related to human beings' lives such as recent developments in genetics and new technologies, a society characterized by both the transgression of spatial and temporal barriers and, paradoxically, by the exclusion of many people from actively participating in its development.

Thinking of a scenario in which knowledge represents the constitutive and identifying element of current times (STEHR, 2000), it is possible to state that the teacher knowledge required temporarily should present a multiple, inter/transdisciplinary nature and be situated in frontiers, which demands from the pedagogical practices in classrooms an also multiple and complex notion of language, an axiological heteroglossia, as pointed by Faraco (2009) when interpreting the Bakhtinian thought. How does one become a teacher in a society full of fractions and changes? How does one carry out a work with discourses so as to contribute for the construction of subjects able

to transit in this society comprehending, interpreting and replying through valued responses the multiple discourses that create meaning in our world?

Within the myriad of possibilities to transform the questions above into pedagogical actions, we believe it is worthwhile to emphasize the necessity of constructing teaching policies oriented by discursive events, configured by unfinished and unrepeatable utterances whose functioning is network rather than structurally determined. We also see as fundamental the articulation of these teaching policies with processes of teacher education focused on a linguistic education able to foster the development of responsible and responsive professionals (SZUNDY, 2014).

Having the notion of dialogism as its nuclear premise, the Bakhtin Circle¹ constructed an unfinished language philosophy, flexible enough to mingle with other theories worried about comprehending the situated uses of language that (de/re)construct meanings in our existence without alibi (BAKHTIN, 1993),² meanings which bring ethical implications to all those participating in social life. For advocating that educators and learners should both become active participants in social changes, empowered to redesign other futures through the heterogeneity of medias, cultures and discourses that characterize life in the contemporary world (COPE; KALANTZIS, 2000), the pedagogy of multiliteracies proposed by the New London Group can, in our view, be hybridized with the Circle's conceptions of language and with the transgressive view of Applied Linguistics (MOITA LOPES, 2006; PENNYCOOK, 2006) in the search of a discursive teacher education responsive and critical to contemporaneity.

Aiming at contributing to the reflections about such a teacher education process, this paper is divided in the following sections: 1 About teachers' knowledge; 2 About the notions of language; 3 About a pedagogy of multiliteracies, and 4 For a teacher education as a responsible act.

¹ References consulted by the author are at the end of the paper. The footnotes have the English versions consulted by the translator whenever possible.

² BAKHTIN, M. M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Translation and notes by Vadim Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993 [orig. 1919].

1 About Teacher Knowledge

The discussion on the notion of knowledge has been addressed by several thinkers. Among them, Santos's (2007) ideas and criticism of the way classic modernity thinks knowledge production deserve to be emphasized. Given the fact that the only kind of knowledge considered reliable is the scientific one, the classic modernity owns, according to Santos, a way of thinking anchored in History linearity, naturalization of differences and in a hegemonic idea about the global and the universal, thoughts that conduct to a monocultural view of knowledge. As an alternative, Santos proposes the replacement of this perspective by a "knowledge ecology," which is configured through the dialogue between the scientific and other knowledge forms, through the linearity break and through the recognition of the traits that, in differences, are fruit of hierarchy. As stated by Geraldi (2003), such a perspective should focus on the recognition of differences that result in and produce inequalities.

In what concerns teacher education in Brazil, Gatti (2010) states that the scenario in relation to teacher knowledge is preoccupying. Among others, issues that deserve special attention include the ambiguity of prescriptive legislation, the fragmentation of formative processes and the specific education for the pedagogical work.

Tardif (2002) also underlines the dichotomy between the pedagogical and the specific education, showing the evident lack of global projects related to teacher education and questioning the teacher knowledge content-based logic, very often limited to the transmission of consecrated knowledge.

By conceptually exploring the notion of teacher knowledge, Tardiff (2000) states that this knowledge is a plural one, constituted by disciplinary knowledge, curricular knowledge, professional knowledge and experience knowledge. Disciplinary knowledge refers to the several knowledge areas; curricular knowledge corresponds to knowledge related to content organization and its distribution in the diverse teaching levels; professional knowledge represents the social and ethical relations with one's own work; finally, the knowledge related to experience is constituted by teachers' every day experiences in their classrooms and their competence to articulate these experiences with disciplinary knowledge. Experience knowledge is, therefore, highly relevant for the educational process success or failure.

In the specific field of pedagogical discourse, Nóvoa (1995) argues that teachers construct their identities by recurring to theoretical and practical knowledge present in their reference framework and by adhering to a set of values. It is in this sense that teachers' professional identities are not stable, an attribute one owns. Rather, it is a space of conflict, construction and deconstruction of ways of being and becoming in the profession.

As well stated by Nóvoa (1995), it is fundamental to rethink what the teacher says, his/her voice about the marginalized context in which he/she works. The development of critical, reflective, intellectual, prepared and engaged teachers conducts to a teacher education view that advances in the construction of a process, in the search to overcome fashionable tendencies that invade the educational field, which are always demanding permanent recycling due to the impressive production of ideas and the delirious speed of technological innovations.

Nóvoa (*apud* SEGANFREDO, 2012) recovers this reflection by advocating that we live in a time of considerable innovations in discourse and very few changes in the concrete reality of teachers and their education. More than ever before, he claims the necessity to engage in new teacher education experiences that consider teaching and its exercise an always contextualized response, which differs from one classroom to another, from a student to another.

The fact is that the teacher knowledge that constitutes school knowledge has become researchers' and teachers' target of discussion and reflection mainly because of the many changes provoked especially by technological innovations in the 21st century. Martin Barbero (2005) is one of the scholars taking part in this dialogue.

According to him, knowledge has progressively occupied the place of human muscular strength and of machines in such a way that we have witnessed a deep mutation in the ways knowledge circulates. A consequence of this is that knowledge has been escaping from the sacred places that kept them as well as from the control of experts.

In what school knowledge is concerned, Barbero (2005) understands that this means that knowledge is neither reduced to books nor to the school itself, which requires the Western culture's founding idea of the book as the sole knowledge organizer to be overcome. It is, thus, fundamental to understand the complexity of processes underlying teaching models that, differently from the ones belonging to a

graphocentric culture focused on the linearity of movements, dislocates and detemporizes knowledge by bringing audiovisual resources, the computer among other innovations into the scene.

Barbero (2005) proposes a transversality constituted of multiple knowledges, which should contemplate three dimensions: The logic-symbolic knowledge demanded in the construction of a mentality in consonance with information technology and the logic it requires; historical knowledge that, through the denaturalization of the obvious, avoids any kind of determinism and destabilizes the present in the process of creating new horizons and future projects; finally, the aesthetic knowledge, knowledge of sensitivity included in the expressive forms related to the body, the emotion and the pleasure. This set of knowledge widens the scope of teachers' work so as to provide answers to the new demands of social life and to the construction of citizenship.

The discussion on teacher education requires the notion of language, subsidiary of every pedagogical practice, to be addressed.

2 About the Notion of Language

Semiotic systems importance and relevance in the studies of social and cultural practices have been considerably explored by several strands of cultural studies. Among them, we emphasize Hall's (1997) analysis on the centrality of culture, in its substantive and epistemological aspects, in the 20th century second half. Among the substantive aspects, he points to the impact of new domains ascension, especially those related to technology, in everyday life, in people's subjectivities and in the constitution of their identities. In the epistemological level, considerable changes provoke a cultural twist in Human Sciences as discourse assumes a relevant role in the studies about cultural changes and fight for power. As a result, these changes increasingly assume their symbolic and discursive nature. For Hall, every social action is cultural and every social practice expresses and communicates meanings, being, therefore meaning practices.

In a so called fluid and moving society, in a liquid modernity in which solids are broken (BAUMANN, 2001), which functions in networks (CASTELLS, 2006) and in which values and senses are materialized refractively by sign systems (VOLOŠINOV,

1986),³ it is imperative to discuss the notions of language and discourse in ways that allow the comprehension and interpretation of the heterogeneous utterances that circulate in social life.

As Barbero (2004) reminds us, it is fundamental to progress from the view of language as an autonomous system to the notion of a concrete discourse/utterance whose non-linear mode of functioning transits between the palimpsest and the hypertext, allowing the access to the multiplicity of circulating writings, languages and discourses.

The discourse notion also assumes a central role in the scope of postcolonial studies once Mignolo (2003) advocates that speaking and writing are strategies to manipulate social interaction domains and once, under the influence of gender, sexuality, race studies, the embodied nature of language starts to be underlined. It is from this perspective that Moita Lopes (2010) argues that the language subject is not anyone, but someone with sex, gender, age, that is, a situated subject. Similarly, Pinto (2010) explores the idea that language can be considered a continuum of action in situations when it is an act of reconstruction more than one of reproduction. In such situations, language becomes a counter-hegemonic practice and, consequently, an act that, for not having an instrumental end or dogmatic project to be followed, is a speech and political act at the same time.

When discussing the scope of Applied Linguistics, Kumaradivelu (2006) proposes that this knowledge area should see language as a discursive practice of social nature that acts on the world and people and adopt a conception of discourse whose roots are founded in its relation with reality and alterity as well as in its use by concrete subjects in also concrete discursive practices. Moita Lopes (2013), on the other hand, defends the comprehension of language as a rhizome to account for a world in flux and for the mutations this language goes through, comprehension that can also trigger the understanding about what the new generations are doing with language. This notion emphasizes the emergence of hybrid texts and the changes they provoke. In these texts, the compositional form of utterances are mingled, hybridized with other languages – the

³ VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986 [orig.1929].

foreign languages – forms, surpassing, thus, the language stratification postulated in the notion of linguistic diversity (BLOOMAERT, 2012).

Adopting a similar line of thought, current studies in the sociolinguistics field relate changes in migratory patterns resulting of globalization and technological innovation, widening the notion of linguistic diversity, which characterized Labovian Sociolinguistics, to the conception of superdiversity.

Changes affecting the compositional form of language through the influence of technological innovations also impose challenges to the canonical notion of language. Society network mode of functioning represents one of the elements provoking changes in the ways people live and act. By bringing out new ways of materializing human communication, the relationship with virtual partners in multiple online communities represents a key element in the changes we have experienced in contemporary urban life.

In written language, we witness changes in the graphic distribution of semiotic materiality as, for instance, the use of abbreviations such as “*tb*” instead of “*também*” (also), “*vc*” instead of “*você*” (you), among so many others, in Portuguese informal digital writing. In the textual plain, hybrid materialized texts with images, sounds and movements mingled with classical graphic writing become more common every day, configuring the so called multimodal texts (SIGNORINI, 2012; LEMKE, 2010; ROJO, 2010).

These changes are evidences of human semiosis dynamism, which we advocate as fundamental in teacher education processes. We regard as a necessary and urgent measure the investment on the construction of a linguistic policy for teacher education oriented by a metaphor that is able to articulate teaching and teacher development to a conception of discourse/language that overcomes the exclusive focus on standardized forms and norms so as to raise awareness about the multiple viewpoints on social and cultural changes through the recognition and interpretation of the heterogeneous discursive practices in our contemporary world.

We find framework to such a conception of language in the Bakhtin Circle’s writings, given their understanding that because language is constructed in intersubjective social relations it materializes socially valued social voices hybridized in a movement between “what has already been said” and “what has not been said yet”

(BAKHTIN, 1981⁴; VOLOŠINOV, 1986).⁵ Since it regards the verbal sign as a material fragment of reality, which both reflect and refract this same reality in processes always conveying meanings and values, this conception of language has at its core the relation between language, reality and alterity (VOLOŠINOV, 1986).⁶

For VOLOŠINOV (1986),⁷ the principle concerning the constitutive relation between language, reality and alterity reiterates the idea that every word carries an evaluative position about its theme and interlocutors, which results from the fact that values constructed by human beings in space and time are refracted in discourse, making the semiotization of varied world views possible. In other words, the verbal sign, as comprehended by the Circle, composes concrete utterances that semiotize ethical acts produced by human beings in concrete activities (BAKHTIN, 1993).⁸

This relation between ethical acts/the human actions practiced in social life and language finds echo in the Bakhtinian (1993) statement that the human being, in his/her concrete existence, is compelled to act and recognize through his/her acts, through which he/she is also recognized. Bakhtin emphasizes that the access and recognition of the ethical acts practiced in social life demand the word to be recognized as a whole, in its conceptual, imagistic and intonational aspects. As a result, taking into account that the object to be known is not something indifferent, neutral, but data full of value expression, concrete utterances require the assumption of a position, an effective and interested attitude – a value-based attitude – that becomes speech act in the “moment of the living, ongoing event” (1993, p.33).⁹

Therefore, it is in such a process that language, regarded as a social constructed activity, provides implicit or explicit access to present discursive positions in dialogic relations triggered among present social voices in concrete produced utterances.

This always value-permeated view of language as the semiotization of ethic acts anchors a notion of language whose dialogic mode of functioning transits between “what has already been said” and “what hasn’t been said yet.” Such a notion escapes

⁴ BAKHTIN, M. Discourse in the Novel. In: BAKHTIN, M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. p.259-422.

⁵ See footnote 3.

⁶ See footnote 3.

⁷ See footnote 3.

⁸ See footnote 2.

⁹ See footnote 2.

completely from a unitary view of language that tries to establish an idea of language as a system of norms in an abstract imperative (BAKHTIN, 1981).¹⁰

Bakhtin Circle thinkers postulate language as a plurilingual axiological heteroglossia since it materializes the social plurilingualism existent in the life world, resultant of language construction through concrete utterances produced by also concrete, different and unequal subjects. As a consequence, these utterances are always permeated by socially valued positions and, thus, by a corporified notion of language whose compositional form refers to a constitutive hybridism.

In its defense of a literacy pedagogy, which values mobility and the critical positioning in relation to the multiplicity of verbal and non-verbal languages that the so called digital natives or migrants (PRENSKY, 2010) resignify to both legitimize and shake crystallized meanings, the pedagogy of multiliteracies claims for an educational process in which participants project new designs to the future. It is in its responsive and responsible attitude to life and in its view of human beings' agentivity in processes of transformation that dialogues between the pedagogy of multiliteracies proposed by the New London Group and the Bakhtin Circle's language philosophy are made possible.

3 About a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies

The pedagogy of multiliteracies proposed by the New London Group was originally conceived as the fruit of the debate among ten professors – Courtney Cazden, Bill Cope, Norman Fairclough, James Gee, Mary Kalantzis, Gunther Kress, Allan Luke, Carmen Luke, Sarah Michaels and Martin Nakata – who met in New London, in the United States, in 1994 with the intention of debating the general purposes of education as well as the close relations between these purposes and a literacy pedagogy. As an initial unfolding of this debate, the Group, composed of researchers from the United States, United Kingdom and Great Britain, published the seminal article *A pedagogy of multiliteracies: designing social futures* (CAZDEN, COPE et al, 1996) in *Harvard Educational Review* and, four years later, the book *Multiliteracies: literacy learning and de the design of social futures* (COPE, KALANTZIS, et al, 2000), which, in addition to

¹⁰ See footnote 4.

a reedited version of the 1996 paper, includes sixteen chapters written by the Group who originally met in New London and other researchers who have joined the Group due to the shared interests in redesigning their practices in the light of a multiliteracies perspective.

Opposing themselves to a “*mere literacy*” pedagogy (CAZDEN, COPE et al, 1996, p.63), a term used to define the focus of many approaches that have informed the reflections about literacy on the written language and on a singular national language conceived as a stable set of rules, the New London Group addresses the multiplicity of language operating in meaning construction processes in our contemporary world as the founding principle to propose a pedagogy of multiliteracies. According to the Group, the term multiliteracies was chosen “to describe two important arguments we might have with emerging cultural, institutional, and global order: the multiplicity of communication channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity” (CAZDEN, COPE et al, 1996, p.63).

Framed on the premise that a new multimodal literacy is crucial to our insertion in a world where meanings increasingly emerge in translocal, multicultural and hybrid forms (COPE; KALANTZIS, 2000), the New London Group advocates that education should lead to the development of meaning designers who are able to understand, produce and transform linguistic, visual, audio, gestural and spatial meanings in the process of designing new social futures at work, public sphere and community.

Taken into consideration the fact that the new capitalism discursive-constructed practices bring impacts to our professional, public and personal lives, the New London Group emphasizes the main changes we have gone through in these three fields of social life to define the “what” and “how” of multiliteracies pedagogy” (NEW LONDON GROUP, 2000, p.19). In relation to the “what,” they defend the adoption of a metalanguage of multiliteracies based on a *design* concept in which “teachers and managers are seen as designers of learning processes and environments not as bosses dictating what those in their charge should think and do” (NEW LONDON GROUP, 2000, p.19). In this perspective, any semiotic activity is treated as a matter of design that should take three aspects into consideration: available designs (resources for meaning construction, design (work developed in semiotic processes from available designs) and redesign (produced and transformed resources in the design process).

The “how” of multiliteracies pedagogies, on the other hand, parts from the group’s epistemological position that “the human mind is embodied, situated and social” (NEW LONDON GROUP, 2000, p.30) to justify the pedagogical reform they propose. Framed on this view, they advocate the continuous reformulation of multiliteracies pedagogy on the basis of four interrelated and non-linear assessments, which are reproduced on the table below:

Situated Practice	immersion in experience and the utilization of available designs of meaning, including those from the students’ lifeworlds and simulations of the relationships to be found in workplaces and public spaces.
Overt Instruction	systematic, analytic, and conscious understanding of Designs of meaning and Design processes. In the case of Multiliteracies, this requires the introduction of explicit metalanguages, which describe and interpret the Design elements of different modes of meaning.
Critical Framing	interpreting the social and cultural context of particular designs of meaning. This involves the students’ standing back from what they are studying and viewing it critically in relation to its context.
Transformed Practice	transfer in meaning-making practice, which puts the transformed meaning (the Redesigned) to work in other contexts or cultural sites.

Table 1 – Components of the “How” of Multiliteracies Pedagogies (NEW LONDON GROUP, 2000, p.35)

In spite of sharing Fairclough’s (1995/2010) view that the pedagogy of multiliteracies is situated in a critical language awareness perspective since its constructions parts from the problematization of work, citizenship and lifeworlds relations in the new global capitalism to propose the (re)design of meanings so as to account for the multiplicity of semiosis and lifestyles in contemporaneity, we can still notice that, in several aspects, the pedagogy designed by the New London Group legitimize some of the orders of discourse from this same capitalism it criticizes. Such a legitimation appears, for instance, in the comparison between teachers and managers used to define the notion of *designer*. It can also be noticed in the emphasis the Group places on the preparation for the labor market, even though the development of a metalanguage able to raise critical awareness about every practice is also emphasized. It is also worthwhile to highlight that the pedagogy of multiliteracies was thought as an educational alternative to respond to the “dramatic global economic change” we have

been going through “as new business and management theories and practices emerge across the developed world” (NEW LONDON GROUP, 2000, p.10). Within this context, the fact of the multiliteracies pedagogy be constructed in the clash between legitimatizing and problematizing crystallized literacy practices from this *developed world* in the search of alternative life and educational designs becomes comprehensible.

For focusing on utterances often (re)situated in (inter)actions processes inscribed on the singularity of concrete events, which are able to transform and be transformed by our responsive (and responsible) attitudes towards life and others, we understand that Bakhtin Circle’s language conceptions can dialogue with those of teacher education, discourse and multiliteracies defended throughout this article to sketch educational landscapes more responsive to our contemporary world.

The last section of this article is dedicated to this sketch.

4 For a Teacher Education as a Responsible Act

The reflection about educational practices that are responsive to our contemporary world cannot be dissociated from the one about teachers’ initial and continuous education. The reasons why these two processes are inseparable is related to the fact that if teachers’ and teacher educators’ ways of thinking and acting are not transformed, traditional literacy practices will continue to be the sole ones legitimized at schools and universities, contributing to increase the distance between educational practices and life and, therefore, to validate marginalization and social exclusion processes.

Parting from the premise that concepts postulated by the Bakhtin Circle’s language philosophy resignified in fruitful dialogues with teacher education concepts, language and literacy in the scope of Applied Linguistics can indicate routes to (trans)form educators who are more responsive to meaning construction practices in our contemporary society, we establish these dialogues as epistemological possibilities to reflect about the two questions we posed in the beginning of this paper:

1. How does one become a teacher in a society full of fractions and changes?
2. How does one carry out a work with discourses so as to contribute for the construction of subjects able to transit in this society comprehending, interpreting and

replying through valued responses the multiple discourses that create meaning in our world?

In a world where technological development leads to the hybridization of languages and cultures in complex meaning (re)creation processes, it seems more pressing than ever before that teachers become discourse analysts able to engage pupils in meaning (re)construction practices oriented by multiliteracies, i.e., by the articulation between multiple semiotic modalities and multiple cultures.

By emphasizing our lack of alibi towards acts that are always inscribed and evaluated in the singularity of life as event, the essay *Towards a Philosophy of Act* (BAKHTIN, 1993)¹¹ raises the reflection that a responsible and *responsive-to-contemporaneity* education cannot allow the segregation of scientific knowledge from its ethical implications on life forms.

[...] A theory needs to be brought into communion *not* with theoretical constructions and conceived life, but with the actually occurring event of moral being – with practical reason, and this is answerably accomplished by everyone who cognizes, insofar as he accepts answerability for every integral act of his cognition, that is, insofar as the act of cognition as *my deed* is included, along with all its content, in the unity of my answerability, in which and by virtue of which I actually live –perform deeds (p.12; emphasis in original).

Therefore, educating as a responsible act demands the awareness that our epistemological options always have an ideological and political nature, bringing ethical implications to other people's lives. In this sense, although the option for the scientific knowledge supremacy in an epistemological orientation that Santos (2007) classified as the “sociology of absences” may seem safer and more comfortable, the assumption that “the act of cognition as my deed is included, along with all its content, in the unity of my answerability” forces us to abandon our comfort zone to question ourselves about the ethical implications of such an orientation.

Parting from a critical position about the way of thinking knowledge in the classic modernity, way which is characterized by historical linearity and homogenization of differences in its search for universal truths and generalizations based on scientific rigor, Santos (2007) proposes its replacement with a perspective

¹¹ See footnote 2.

called “knowledge ecology.” Given its characterization by the dialogue between scientific and other forms of knowledge, the disruption of historical temporality and by practices that promote the “decolonization” of minds through the comprehension of mechanisms that produce inequalities, the perspective proposed by Santos (2007) indicates a possible way to (trans)form teachers who are able to semiotize ethical acts in our contemporary society.

Similarly to Santos (2007), other scholars interested in teacher education (NÓVOA, 1995; TARDIFF, 2000; BARBERO, 2005; CELANI, 2010 etc.) underline the complexity of this process marked by conflicts, uncertainties, ruptures and struggle among different kinds of knowledge: curricular, professional and experience (TARDIFF, 2000) – summing it up, a destabilization and, thus, a transformation process. If teaching is considered a contextualized answer in the sense proposed by Nóvoa (2005), it seems inevitable to take into consideration teacher’s roles in a society in which school is no longer the *knowledge keeper* and books are no longer the main means to knowledge access (BARBERO, 2005). More than ever before, teachers are challenged in their practice to leave the comfort zone provided by scientific rigor and open spaces to explore the ethical consequences of situated meanings increasingly constructed through multiple discourses.

For focusing on the multiplicity and hybridization of discourses and cultures called by contemporary society in meaning construction processes as well as on the ethical implications of such processes in the world of work, civic pluralism and lifeworlds, the pedagogy of multiliteracies is constructed in the imbrication between theory and ethical acts inscribed in life as event. As a result, it represents an epistemological alternative for *a pedagogical work with discourses capable of contributing with the construction of subjects able to transit in this society comprehending, interpreting and replying through valued responses the multiple discourses that create meaning in our world* (question 2).

Since it takes the notion of design as a nuclear element in meaning construction process and emphasizes the multiple modalities of designs mobilized in this process (linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial, audio etc.), the multiliteracies pedagogy denies any possibility of a mere abstract work with language, taking as teachers’ pedagogical

objects the meanings refracted by concrete utterances, which are always (re)situated in social, historical and cultural specific contexts.

The comprehension of the New London Group (2000, p.20) of design as “any semiotic activity, including language to produce and consume texts,” activity accomplished through three processes: available designs, design and redesign, approaches the treatment the Group gives to language of Vološinov suggestion that:

[...] social psychology must be studied from two different viewpoints: first, from the viewpoint of content, i.e., the themes pertinent to it at this or that moment in time; and second; from the viewpoints of the forms and types of verbal communication in which the themes in question are implemented (i.e., discussed, expressed, questioned, pondered over, etc.) (1986, p.20)¹²

Such an approach occurs in the assumption that *designs* for the New London Group and the speech genres by the Bakhtin Circle are permanently (*re*)*updated* and (*re*)*designed* through specific communities’ responsive attitudes in always-situated historical moments. It is, thus, the historical development triggered by human agency in different communities that allows the transformation of meanings constructed through the constant *redesign* of available *discourse types and forms (designs)*. From this perspective, it makes complete sense that both meaning construction forms performed through multimodality and the hybridization of genres and possibilities of (*re*)*designing* more ethical meanings be taken as the object of a responsive-to-contemporaneity pedagogy.

Despite the contemporary calling of the speech/textual genre conceptions to deal with privations in the educational system (ROJO, 2008), the treatment given to genre, especially in theories operating with the notion of textual genre, has mainly focused on genre’s stable characteristics and on the development of competencies/capacities that lead to the comprehension and production of the oral and written genres circulating in the social world.

One of the implications of this kind of treatment for the literacy practices at school has considerably often been the genre displacement from micro and macrolinguistic contexts that interact in meaning construction to abstractly focus on the

¹² See footnote 3.

stable characteristics defining news, comics, recipes, editorial, blogs, etc. Another, and maybe more serious, unfolding is that since it doesn't look at how genres mingle and hybridize with other genres and semiosis in processes of constant (re)designing meanings, such a treatment can end up contributing to the mere (re)production of genres legitimized by school, leaving little or no space at all for the innovations and destabilization that mingling and transgression processes print to texts in contemporaneity and, as a consequence, for a critical position in relation to meanings constructed in the margins of what school validates as acceptable literacy practices.

By proposing a pedagogical reform in which literacy practices are oriented towards the redesign of social futures through the immersion in situated experiences, the development of a metalanguage to describe and interpret different meaning modalities and the critical visioning of contexts where meanings are both constructed and transformed, the pedagogy of multiliteracies open spaces to teacher education and teaching/learning processes focused on the event, the unrepeatable, on discursive activities whose functioning isn't mainly defined by structure but by network. It presents, therefore, pedagogical instruments open to plurilingualism.

Final Remarks

Inspired by the dialogues that Bakhtin's philosophy of responsible act made us establish with teacher education perspectives in the scope of Applied Linguistics, we sought to outline a reflection about the meanings of educating as a responsible act, highlighting the fundamental roles played by teachers and their (trans)formations to redesign a pedagogy more responsive to our contemporary world.

In order to sketch this reflection, the epistemological alternative we elected was to relate the conceptions of the Bakhtin Circle's philosophy of language with notions of teacher knowledge, discourse and language, multiliteracies and teacher of discourses education as a responsible act. Being a fruit of the dialogues we have established between theoretical and experience knowledge in the flow of our lives as events as professors, teacher educators and applied linguists, this epistemological route culminated in the defense of multiliteracies pedagogy as a possibility to redesign education landscapes more responsive to contemporaneity.

Framed on the denial of the existence of a standard and universal national language to advocate an access pedagogy whose function “is to develop an epistemology of pluralism that provides access without people having to erase or leave behind different subjectivities” (NEW LONDON GROUP, 2000, p.18), the pedagogy of multiliteracies seem to talk with the dialogical and plurilingual conception of language designed by the Bakhtin Circle in the search for the comprehension and transformation of multisemiotic refracted meanings in contemporary literacy practices. As a result, it can be considered a possibility to seek ethically responsive and responsible answers to the contemporary world.

Taking into consideration that educational answers are always situated and contextualized ones, the route we chose constitutes one among many possible (re)designs. Nevertheless, no matter what the chosen designs are, it is important to emphasize that a responsible education is always responsive to life and is always inserted with no alibi in the life as an event so as to resignify and transform it.

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