


Literature and cultural difference: The teaching of literature in the Amazons

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this work is to elaborate a proposal for discussion on the teaching of literature in the Amazon, having as reference theorists who bring the challenge of discussing diversity, alterity and cultural differences, for that, we approach, in this discussion, theorists such as: Homi K. Bhabha (2010), Antoine Compagnon (2007), Marjorie Perloff (2013), Franz Fanon (2008), Walter Benjamin (1994), Antônio Candido (1995), among others, who propose the challenge of thinking about difference and cultural diversity. In this text, we will discuss reading practices and the teaching of literature in schools in the Amazon, as well as the advances, limitations and space reserved for literature in the curriculum and in school. The basic principle of the discussion is that what an individual understands by culture may not be seen in the same way by another, since the latter's gaze may be contaminated by the vice of rejection of the culture of others, inert to the differences of being beyond or on the border. In this sense, we are thinking here about the edges, the moving borders, the mixtures, capable of problematizing the model, the standardized forms.

Keywords: Cultural diversity, Difference, Literature, Amazons.

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INTRODUCTION

This work aims to raise and discuss hypotheses about the place of literature in school, as well as its contribution as an object of formation and resistance. The discussion fostered is reflected in the theory of authors who propose the challenge of discussing cultural diversity in a multicultural space: the school and, especially, the school in the Amazons. For this debate, we are in tune with the theories of Homi K. Bhabha (2010), Walter Benjamin (1994), Franz Fanon (2008), Abdala Junior (2007), among others, who discuss the paths of literature and its intricacies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Tzvetan Todorov (2017), when he published one of his most intriguing books, *Literature in Danger*, in 1939, already said that literature faced – and would face, in the coming centuries – a great risk of being suppressed and placed in the background or third place, not for lack of good productions, good writers and poets, but for lack of literary readers. It seems that the current world is going in the opposite direction of literature: while we live in the time of haste, literature is slowly moving in the opposite direction of great agitations, unhurried, timeless.

In view of this, the formation of literary readers has become an increasingly difficult challenge to be faced, and the death of literature, predicted by many theorists of the last century, seems to make more and more sense today. Literature seems to fight against everything and everyone in a world dominated by immediacy, futility, and disposable pleasures. Literature, on the other hand, is born in the cracks of reality, like a weed that grows slowly, unnoticed, but capable of causing a great stir in the lives of those who have the right to read, a right that is undeniable as the daily food we need to survive. In this regard, the great master of literature, Antonio Candido (1995, p. 249), warns us:

By humanization I mean the process that confirms in man those traits that we consider essential, such as the exercise of reflection, the acquisition of knowledge, the good disposition towards others, the refinement of emotions, the ability to penetrate the problems of life, the sense of beauty, the perception of the complexity of the world and of beings, the cultivation of humor. Literature develops in us the share of humanity to the extent that it makes us more understanding and open to nature, society, and our fellow human beings.

Antonio Candido attributes to literature, elements that go far beyond the ludic and cathartic functions, for him, literature has a fundamental role in the social formation of man, his interaction with the social environment in which he is immersed, in the perception of life, in the confrontation of everyday problems, in this sense, literature develops in the subject, greater sense of humanization and understanding of the world.



LITERATURE AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The contribution of literature in the formation of more critical and supportive citizens is perceived when we see men and women identifying themselves as subjects of their own history, constituting themselves authors of their culture, even if often influenced by the culture of the other. But how can literature contribute to the formation of critical subjects?

To answer this question, which emphasizes the importance of literature in social life, we take as a reference different theoretical conceptions about Literature. In this way, we will investigate, from the point of view of a relationship between Literature and reality and taking as reference the figurational element, the ways used by writers to talk about time and social space, elements that help us to understand the processes of collective life and the space of the other.

In view of this, however, the problem arises, with regard to reading and literature, of considering the literary work as a narrative and as an image of social life. We cannot, however, leave aside the artistic value of the literary work, also understood as an aesthetic and imaginative object, loaded with its own significance, whose value goes beyond the ability to give only concrete answers and specific questions of human life. The objective of this research is, therefore, from the reflection on readings of texts and literary works with a focus on identity differentiation, to perceive the intrinsic values in each reading, to analyze the relationship between Literature and social life, in addition to reflecting on the problems that point to a rediscovery of the imaginary in the plane of social life. Regarding this discussion, Candido (1985, p. 5) states:

This is, in fact, the core of the problem, because when we are in the field of literary criticism we are led to analyze the intimacy of the works, and what matters is to ascertain what factors act in the internal organization, in such a way as to constitute a peculiar structure. Taking the social factor, we would try to determine whether it provides only matter (environment, customs, group traits, ideas), which serve as a vehicle to conduct the creative current (in Lukács's terms, if it only enables the realization of aesthetic value); or whether, in addition, it is an element that acts in the constitution of what is essential in the work as a work of art (in Lukács's terms, if it is determinant of aesthetic value).

The hypothesis defended by the Brazilian theorist refers us to statements pointed out by him in *Literature and Society* (1985). In this work, the author asks: "what is the influence exerted by the environment on the work of art?" (CANDIDO, 1985, p.18). This leads us to another question: what is the influence exerted by the work of art on the social environment? Candido (1985) provokes us to continue in the field of questions: how does literary art communicate with society? And how does society react when talking about the work of art?

Through his personal way of seeing the world, the author of a literary work recreates another reality loaded with its own meaning, which acts on the reader-public, causing a practical effect on its conduct and conception of the world, transforming patterns, breaking stigmas, forming groups and messing with aesthetic and moral standards (POUND, 2006). Society, therefore, appropriates the



text, in a dialogical movement, and receives influences from the work at the same time that it returns them to the artist and, in this way, we have an intrinsic relationship: author, work and reader.

In this proposition, the American Ezra Pound (2006) translates this relationship in such a way that, sociologically, we can say that literary art communicates through a symbolic system of inter-human communication and, therefore, presupposes the existence of: the person who communicates, in this case, the artist, the author of the work; the communication, which presupposes the work itself, a notice to the public to whom the work is addressed; and, finally, the action that the work causes on society, that is, the effect, an effect that turns again to the author. In a Bakhtinian view of language, we can call this relationship social-interactionist.

Every discourse, according to Bakhtin (2000), is constituted by a boundary between what is theirs and what is theirs. This principle is called dialogism. From this perspective, the utterance is understood as a social manifestation, a reflection of the environment, that is, it reflects the specific conditions and purposes of each literary genre, as well as bringing with it linguistic identity marks and styles of epochs, related to the historical context.

From this hypothesis, we perceive that the most relevant in this process is the result of the effect produced from the dualistic relationship between the reader and the work, in which, from this extraction, an expectation of cultural identity of each social group and of the subject as an individual is elaborated. From this appreciation, the need to harmonize such an encounter without introspection of the reader with the work becomes inherent, in a dialogue devoid of doctrinaire influences with the author, with the literary world. It is essential to put the reader in a direct confrontation with the text, to provoke him, to instigate him to leave the world of mediocrity for the world of strange, eccentric things, to invite him to changes that, although they may be dangerous, will certainly be worthwhile. To this literature to which we refer, the literature that disturbs, that throws the reader into the abyss of indecision, that fills with doubts instead of answers, the literature that provokes fear, strangeness, but, above all, provokes change.

We are aware of the difficulties that students and, in general, young people encounter in relation to literary reading, as well as the limitations faced by teaching intuitions to produce readers and, especially, literary readers. The lack of public libraries and libraries in schools, the lack of adequate spaces for reading, the very small number of collections available, among other situations, have contributed significantly to the scarcity of literary readers.

The initiative to grant access to individuals who have not had the opportunity to reach literature and other cultural practices presupposes inserting them in a context of historical changes, subject to the same guarantees in a way that permeates the socioeconomic and political-cultural system of human civilization. If we want to insert these individuals into a context of change, the main tool must be reading. In view of this, we need to understand that man is a product of the



historical condition, suffers from direct interventions of the social space in which he is inserted, and, in this context, must be understood as a socio-political and cultural project, in Sartre's view of the term. From this point of view, necessity and freedom are distinct elements, completely intrinsic to the human project discussed here and which, through literature, can be reverberated and rediscussed.

To overcome the historical losses suffered by colonial policy, it is necessary, first of all, to deconstruct centuries of cultural imposition. It is about creating mechanisms that enable and facilitate the participation and insertion of historically marginalized social groups in the decision-making processes of power, in a critical and conscious way. For this, it is necessary to integrate them in spaces where Literature can be part of their worlds, as well as to make social emancipation a project for all, built with the participation of all those involved. However, first of all, it is necessary to involve these historically depoliticized groups dominated by the colonialist culture.

LITERATURE, IDENTITY AND MARGINAL DISCOURSES

Reading and Literature as a recreation of reality become instruments of transformation as they begin to break barriers imposed by the elitist, canonical culture, and begin to be introduced as a daily element of the common subject inserted in this same society. It is hoped that, by getting involved with the world of Literature, he can get involved with others, more and more, making literary reading a common social practice in the community space. In this way, what our work proposes would be implemented.

To understand social groups, it is necessary to unveil their daily lives, the contradictory context in which they are inserted, their manifestations and cultural practices, in order to understand the way of life of those involved. In addition, it is necessary to deconstruct identity models taken as standard, and to reconstruct perspectives focused on respect for differences.

In order to enter the universe of Literature, one must understand that this reality is neither homogeneous nor uniform, on the contrary, it masks differentiated social relations and rejections. It is necessary to resume the historical process, as we said earlier, of the construction and deconstruction of the social subject of many identities.

The idea of working with literary texts does not consist in identifying one period or another, but rather in deconstructing, realizing that Literature, even when understood in its totality, presents itself as something unfinished and indeterminate. We know very well that a literary period is not closed by date or even by a century, for there is always a continuity, although perhaps this organization is necessary for socio-political effect.

The relevance of this research, in this sense, consists in perceiving Literature as an instrument of transformation, primordial, therefore, for the formation of critical subjects and participants of a social construction from which they have been historically excluded, that is, the right to culture,



reading and Literature. It is necessary to re-establish the place of the literary text in the school space, to restructure the forms of teaching, the way of reading and to return to Literature as a primordial object of education, removing it from the margins and putting it back in a prominent place.

Thus, there is an urgent need to review important points in the teaching of Literature and reading in the classroom, and to propose a teaching that does not focus only on the strictly chronological presentation, but starts to give greater relevance to a thematic bias, opposes canonical models as a single format of literary reading and, at the same time, juxtapose canonical and non-canonical authors. This teaching methodology goes beyond the conventional models of textbooks and theories that point out, as a singular form of Literature, the classics offered through the curriculum interposed in schools, leaving aside all the written and oral production of non-canonical authors, but who leave their contribution relevant to the social environment.

To this end, the proposal under discussion consists of selecting diversified themes chosen according to their relevance to the reality of the school community, prioritizing readings that promote direct dialogues between the subject-reader and the text, and comparativism with authors from different times and spaces, if necessary. That is, to present Afro-Brazilian, indigenous, African, and Amazonian authors within the same reading perspective, side by side with anthological authors. The idea of this proposal consists, therefore, of a comparative exercise that enables multiple perspectives on the teaching of Literature, opening space for reading practices based on collective perceptions devoid of literary and cultural prejudices.

However, it is not intended, with this, to fail to address the literary schools and their chronologies, each with its ideological peculiarities, but to understand that this approach can occur in a secondary way, according to the theme and its meanings. In the foreground should be the deepening of the ability of critical readings, the spaces for contestation, the direct dialogue with reading, which can be exercised through debates in the classroom and moments reserved for reading and the promotion of cultural and literary literacy.

Currently, there is little room for the practice of reading and the teaching of Literature in elementary school, and in high school, only the third year has classes in the subject. This reflects directly on the lack of reading and interpretation, which were not encouraged, and when they were, they ended up being done in a superficial way, not because of the teacher's fault, we believe, but because of the little relevance given to the subject by the institutions. Thus, students arrive at high school with little or no affinity with reading and literature, when they are not totally unaware of the subject. These are some of the limitations that student-subjects have when it comes to Literature and other related cultural practices.

On the other hand, demonstrating that Literature is not just literature goes beyond romantic concepts, dates and poems, as defined by Professor João Alexandre Barbosa (2009, p.10):



Literature is never just literature, what we read as Literature is always more – it is History, Psychology, Sociology. There is always more than literature in literature. However, these elements or levels of representation of reality are given in literature by literature, by the efficacy of literary language.

With this thought, we realize the great relevance of reading and literature in the sense of being a guide for other cultures, breaking with its own barriers and entering other areas of knowledge. Literature goes beyond scholastic and chronological pedagogical contents, it is also political and social, it includes reflecting on the socio-interactional aspects of discourse. Cultural literacy permeates the scope of writing, as it is much more than that, and proposes the appreciation of the agraf cultures and reflection on the way of seeing the world and the community life of these peoples, their dance, their memories, habits and way of survival.

All cultures are models of cultural literacies, although with different structures: indigenous, Afro-Brazilian, quilombolas, fishing communities, riverside dwellers and several others, all have their peculiar characteristics. These should be understood as spaces of identity construction formed by elements that differentiate them from others because they live in borders that limit the space of the other. In this way, many of these cultures are constructed in the frontier space, in hybridity, as stated by the postcolonial theorist Home K. Bhabha (2014). The author understands hybridity as an element that is part of language and, thus, echoes in the representation:

Taking the subaltern instance as "doubly inscribed", I could argue that it is the dialectical hinge between the birth and death of the subject that needs to be interrogated. Perhaps the charge that a politics of the subject results in a hollow apocalypse is itself a fulfillment of the p6s-structuralist probing of the notion of progressive negation – or refusal – in dialectical thought. The subaltern or the metonymic is neither empty nor full, neither part nor whole. Its compensatory and vicarious processes of signification are an instigation of social translation, the production of seaweed beyond, which is not only the court or gap of the subject, but also the intersection of social places and disciplines. This hybridity inaugurates 0 projects of political thought, continually confronting it with 0 strategic and contingent, with thought that counterbalances its own "non-thought". It has to negotiate its goals through a recognition of differential objects and discursive levels articulated not simply as content, but in their interpellator as forms of textual or narrative subjects - be these governmental, judicial or artistic. Despite his firm commitments, the politician must always put as a problem, or inquiry, the priority of the place from which he started, if he does not want his authority to become autocratic (BHABHA, 2014, p. 114).

The theorist draws attention to the hybridity in the construction of language, which implies the impossibility of describing this discourse or this subject as authentic. Thus, any form of representation, according to Bhabha (2014), is hybrid, has traces of both discourses, is built on the border, built on differences, and there is, therefore, a search for authenticity, but this is fruitless.

The recognition of other cultures as superior or inferior must be left open, as we must reconstruct our thinking in relation to the colonialist thought that has always overlapped as the dominant thought in the Amazon, leading us to believe in the cultural supremacy of the colonized in



relation to the colonizer. This thought has gradually been deconstructed in the light of theorists who have accepted the challenge of discussing cultural differences and diversity in postmodernity.

From this perspective, Literature emerges as a weed in the cracks of reality, not only as an amusement, nor as a specialized knowledge, as a precarious and subtle instrument that serves to interrogate life, detaching certainties and transforming them into uncertainties. It offers us questions rather than answers, questions that are largely unpleasant and disturb us for days, months, and sometimes years, or a lifetime. Literature transforms, changes concepts, makes us dive into the restlessness of the characters. The one who reads will come out stunned and transformed: another man, though in the same body, but never with the same soul.

LITERATURE, TEACHING AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

To understand social groups, it is necessary to unveil their daily lives, it is necessary to consider the contradictory context in which they are inserted, their manifestations and practices Cultural, understand the way of life of those involved. It is necessary to deconstruct models Identity taken as a standard and reconstruct looks aimed at respect To Differences. In order to allow it in the universe of literature, it must be understood that this reality is neither homogeneous nor uniform, on the contrary, it masks differentiated social relations and rejections. It is necessary to resume the historical process, as I said earlier, of the construction and deconstruction of the social subject of many identities. The idea is not to identify one period or another, the idea is to deconstruct, to realize that literature, even when understood in its totality, always presents itself as something unfinished and indeterminate, we know very well that a period is not closed by date or even by a century, there is always a continuity, although perhaps this organization is necessary for a socio-political effect.

The debate proposed in this study consists of perceiving literature as an instrument of social and cultural transformation, as mentioned, in addition to understanding its subsidies in human and professional education. These are essential for the formation of critical subjects and sharers of a social construction that gives the right to reading and literature, rights that, in many cases, have been denied to various individuals and social groups of which they are part. The need for the subject to be the author of this process is emphasized, however, it is necessary to ensure that this agent has access to the literary universe, in order to enable the groups involved to remake themselves culturally in the inserted social environment.

We are also interested in showing, in this chapter, how the didactic and methodological aspects of this research and the intervention project developed by us were outlined. In order to achieve the established objectives, 30 (thirty) students in the last year of nine-year elementary school were investigated and questioned. Questions were raised about various forms of cultural and literary knowledge, and countless voices were heard in the classroom. Conversation circles, interviews, chats



about readings, debates were held and, finally, the text workshop that generated the writing of the project took place. We present here the didactic-methodological aspects that guided the steps of this research, as well as the choice of the class, the presentation of the project and the steps developed that brought us here.

Before discussing didactics and methodologies for teaching Literature, we need to point out some preliminary aspects that seem relevant to us and were used in the preparation of the materials and in the elaboration of the intervention and workshops. These aspects focus on three questions that need to be taken into account even before initiating any pedagogical movement. They are:

- The first focuses on the aims and objectives of teaching Literature. For Todorov (2009), it is necessary, first of all, to ask: teach literature for what? This question leads to another: how to teach literature? In this way, techniques and purposes are united. Is it intended to increase the cultural level of the students? But what kind of culture is it? Formation of readers? Cooperate in the formation of individual identities or discuss the formation of joint values and the elaboration of a common one – the national one – and the feeling of belonging to that culture.
- The second relevant point before planning concerns the definition of literature, that is: what literature should be taught? Canonical literature, contemporary text, marginal literature, indigenous, African, popular literature? Oral or written (printed)? The choice of texts is a respectable process for the realization of the process, so should one work with fragments of text or with complete works? These observations of different guidelines of the Literature intervene and make its teaching complex.
- Last, but not least, and which we cannot disregard: it is necessary to take into account the advances and new theories that configure a new scenario, which reflects on the teaching of Literature and its guidelines.

Observing these methodological insertions, it leads to the practices of readings and cultural events capable of attracting the reader and launching him to the challenge of new discoveries through the reading selected with the purpose of forming new efficient and, above all, curious readers, who immerse themselves in the text in search of new discoveries and new adventures.

THE CHOICE OF WORKS: WHAT LITERATURE TO TEACH?

To continue in the process of planning methodological techniques and strategies, an important issue is the choice of works, which is decisive for the formation of reader-subjects. We are not unaware that the teaching of Literature as a school subject must take into account the curriculum and the official directions, but we also know that it is often possible to choose works and texts on a certain list so that they can be read in the classroom.



In this regard, three important factors should be considered when preparing a discussion proposal for the realization of reading workshops in the classroom and cultural literacy practices. They are: generic diversity, historical diversity and geographical diversity, which must also be considered in relation to the nature of the project.

Generic diversity refers to the variety of genres chosen. It is valid to confront traditional genres such as novels, theater, poetry and essays, with new genres, including autofiction, comics, fanfiction and others, growing new genres. Historical diversity, on the other hand, involves mixing canonical works, which reflect the values and style of an era and time, with contemporary works, which represent changes in values and customs, as well as casting a glance at today.

The third factor, i.e., geographical diversity, refers to representing, in literature, the different cultures around the world. In this way, national and foreign literature can be read side by side, and great epic works can be translated into the present, in a current language that, however, demonstrates the great value of ancestral cultures. On the other hand, national works of great symbolic value in the construction of the reader's identity can be read, as well as works by Amazonian authors, contrasting with foreign works with the intention of constituting cultural diversity and symbolic sharing of a universal gaze.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The teaching of literature in schools in the Amazon is still a great and arduous challenge. It is necessary to provoke in the student the yearning for literary reading, capable of awakening the aesthetic pleasure, the political and social formation inherent to each subject that is part of a community. In the current context, it is necessary to deal with a new generation of readers who have shown little interest in literature, as well as modern society in general, and, therefore, there are many dangers that Literature has faced to survive in recent centuries.

On the one hand, the media has reduced literature to the entertainment market, with voluminous works that have little influence on the social and professional formation of the reader. On the other hand, the university has made an effort to transform it into specialized knowledge, meritocratizing it with the titles of masters and doctors of the great literary theories. Both perspectives contribute to the weakening – if not death – of literature, as already predicted by Todorov (2007) and many other historians and sociologists in the last century.

Literature reduced to a mere object of amusement or to specialized knowledge is rendered almost useless. However, we know very well the damage that it can cause in the quiet and banal life of an ordinary reader, if, in fact, this reader launches himself into reading, into the right work: this reader will never be the same again, because, although in the same body, he will have a different look at the world and at people, so the choice of literary works is as important as the act of reading. The



hypothesis presented here, in addition to provoking in the reader a taste for reading, also contributes to the construction of this reader's identity and the formation of his personality.

In this way, what was experienced in the reading represents, for the reader, new events that place him in an abyss of questions and unanswered questions, as different universal and existential questions are presented, related, for example, to love, desire, betrayal, suffering, passions, death, loneliness, among others. These experiences can provoke in the adolescent reader an emotional impact of a gigantic proportion, an impact that contributes to the transformation brought about by literature, and it is this literature that we are talking about, the literature that transforms. Hence the need for special care in the choice of works and with the chosen reading.



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