Who benefits from Western forms of education? Unveiling 'epistemological blindness' in language teacher education

Quem beneficia dos modos de educação ocidentais? Desocultando a 'cegueira epistemológica' na formação de professores de língua

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Abstract

The text analyses the impact of current educational policies on schooling and teacher education practices in Portugal with a focus on bilingual/ bicultural students. Building on selected key-concepts and themes that traverse the work of critical analysts, including the concept of "epistemological blindness", the text seeks to analyse how the techno-rational epistemologies underlie the subtractive forms of education that are imposed on bilingual/bicultural students in Portugal. The narratives of both beginning and experienced language teachers, on teacher education programs at the University of Minho, will be used to show how Western, Eurocentric epistemologies and "epistemological blindness" work in schools to undermine progressive and inclusive education for bilingual/ bicultural children. Their narratives on their experiences and on how they resonate with critical texts on schooling will be analysed, highlighting the difficulties and dilemmas these teachers experience that can be attributed to the disempowering forms of education these students are subjected to and that are seldom questioned. The education of bilingual/bicultural students in Portugal is located on the other side of the epistemic abyss that Boaventura Sousa Santos identifies in modern Western Eurocentric rationality. The naturalization of their invisibility in Portuguese schools and the absence of a critical multicultural teacher education programs are very much justified by the prevailing curriculum and teacher education policies and practices, but also by the 'teaching to the test' classroom practices that disempower both students and teachers.

Keywords: Language education. Teacher education. Epistemologies. Epistemological blindness.

Resumo

O texto analisa o impacto das políticas educativas atuais na escolarização e formação de professores em Portugal, focando o caso dos estudantes bilingues/ biculturais. A partir de conceitos-chave e temas oriundos do trabalho de analistas críticos e que incluem o conceito de "cegueira epistemológica" o artigo procura analisar o modo como as epistemologias tecnicistas subjazem às formas de educação subtractiva à qual os estudantes bilingues/ biculturais são sujeitos. As narrativas de professores principiantes e experientes serão usadas para evidenciar o modo como as epistemologias Ocidentais e Eurocêntricas, e a "cegueira epistemológica" funciona nas escolas para minar uma educação progressista e inclusiva para os estudantes bilingues/ biculturais. As narrativas da experiência e o modo como encontram ecos nos textos críticos sobre a escolarização serão objeto de análise, evidenciando as dificuldades e dilemas que estes professores experienciam e que podem ser atribuídos aos modos excludentes de educação aos quais estes estudantes são submetidos e que raramente são problematizados. A educação dos estudantes bilingues/ biculturais em Portugal encontra-se no outro lado do abismo epistémico que Boaventura Sousa Santos identifica na racionalidade Ocidental e Eurocêntrica moderna. A naturalização da sua invisibilidade nas escolas portuguesas e a ausência de uma educação multicultural crítica são justificadas em larga medida pelas políticas e práticas de curriculares e de formação de professores, mas também pelas práticas de avaliação das aprendizagens orientadas para e pelos testes que atuam no sentido de oprimir, quer o trabalho docente quer as aprendizagens dos estudantes.

Palavras-chave: Educação em línguas. Formação de professores. Epistemologias. Cegueira epistemológica.

Introduction

"Who exactly has been benefiting from the Western form of democracy?", asks Peter Orelus (2014, p. 57), when he, with Noam Chomsky, analyses the subtractive educational situation of bilingual students in US schools. When large sociolinguistic groups have historically been forbidden to learn (or even speak) their home languages at schools, "the concept of democracy becomes more of an illusion than a reality", Peter Orelus (2014, p. 56) ends up stating.

This text[i] discusses how modern Western European epistemicidium (cf. PARASKEVA, 2011, 2016, SANTOS, 2008) works in Portuguese schools and in language teacher education to undermine progressive and inclusive education for bilingual/ bicultural children. It draws on critical theory and pedagogy (DARDER, 2015, FREIRE, 1975; 2013, PARASKEVA, 2011, 2016, SANTOMÉ, 2011, 2017) to analyse how the received field in language teacher education needs to be deterritorialized in order to properly address the roots of oppression that naturalizes the invisibility of bilingual/ bicultural students in Portuguese schools. A sample of narratives produced by both beginning and experienced language teachers on teacher education programs at the University of Minho are used to highlight the shortcomings, difficulties and dilemmas language teachers experience. These limitations can be attributed to the disempowering and subtractive forms of education these children are subjected to and that are seldom questioned, but also due to the 'neutral' curricula in language teacher education that has been systematically unable to seriously address the structural inequalities associated with these children's education, such as racism, poverty, and widespread discrimination (cf. DARDER, 2015; MAY; SLEETER, 2010, SKUTNABB-KANGAS et al., 2009, SANTOMÉ, 2017). It is also necessary to denounce the effects of neoliberal thinking and reasoning – that it is the minority children and their parents who are deficient, rather than the schools and societies at large (CUMMINS; SKUTNABB-KANGAS, 1988), as well as prevailing teaching and assessment practices.

As Oliveira (2007) contends, we (still) do not know much about the ways of learning that generate the reading of the world surrounding us and this is damaging to the way we could understand, in a deeper mode, the critical questions related to teaching and learning in schools, as we (still) are too connected and dependent on supposedly 'universal' scientific

ways of reading the world. These supposedly 'universal' scientific epistemologies, of a technical nature, are what Carr and Kemmis (2005) equate with

> … a form of rationality conveyed by the dominant ideology sustaining the culture of modernity and, hence, the form of rationality that is embedded in the contemporary discourse organisation and practice of modern education. Both MacIntyre and Habermas called this cultural ideology 'scientism', for it is the essence of scientism to sustain a culture that insists that any form of reasoning that does not conform to the technical rationality of science should be excluded from the realm of rational discourse. (p. 351)

In order to counteract the prevalence of technical reasoning or 'scientism', Oliveira (2007), building on the work of Boaventura Sousa Santos, proposes the idea that there is in each one of us an "epistemological blindness" that comes from the partiality of our own personal vision and point of view, a vision that is developed within a culture, but also informed by individual experiences; thereupon, she continues, we do not possess the means to fully understand and be able to believe, see, read, listen to certain ways of reading the world. Paulo Freire's (1997) insightful vision for schooling as providing a both theoretical and practical context for *learning to read the world* should be advanced now:

> In daily life, our mind does not operate epistemologically. (…) it is in the operation of 'gaining distance' from the object that we 'come closer' to it. 'Becoming aware' of the object is becoming epistemologically 'closer' to it. Only in this way we can 'admire' the object (…)
> In a first moment, that of the experience of and in daily life, my sentient body becomes exposed to the facts, achievements, without, yet, interrogate itself about them, to reach its 'reason for being'. (…) In a second moment, when our mind operates epistemologically, the methodological rigour with which we come closer to the object, after 'having distanced ourselves' from it, that is, objectified it, offers another type of knowledge. (…) the discussion on these two types of knowledge brings the debate on theory and practice; these knowledges can only be understood if perceived and captured in their contradictory relationships. Never in isolation, never one in itself. Neither just theory, nor just practice. This is why the positions of sectarian political-ideological nature are wrong (…) basism denies validity to theory; theoretical elitism denies validity to practice. The rigour with which I come closer to the objects prohibits my inclination towards any of these positions: neither basism nor elitism, but theory and practice illuminating one another. (p. 82-83, my translation)

In this text I will discuss how we, teacher educators and researchers, need to explore new ways of seeing the world and of producing knowledge that "expos[es] social, cultural, political, psychological, and educational forces not discernible at first glance" (KINCHELOE; BERRY, 2004, p. 20) in schools and in teacher education. Resorting to a purposive sample of the narratives of two groups of foreign/ second language teachers, beginning and experienced practitioners, produced within pre-service and in-service teacher education programs at the University of Minho, critical discourse analysis (FAICLOUGH; WODAK, 1997) will be used to evidence how teachers' narratives are not only embedded in a

particular professional and pedagogical culture, ideology or history, but also connected intertextually to other discursive paradigms that bind them to oppressive teaching practices while imagining more liberating and more democratic ones. They highlight the difficulties and dilemmas experienced with the education of bilingual/ bicultural children in public schools in Portugal and the ways the dreams and possibilities for a better future for these children are severely restrained.

On the neoliberal, conservative, and neo-colonial momentum

The nefarious impact of neoliberal educational reforms in schools and in teacher education internationally is widely denounced in the work of many critical scholars (APPLE, 2000, DARDER, 2015, GIROUX, 2015, SANTOMÉ, 2017, ZEICHNER, 2013, 2018, among many others). By dis-intellectualizing teachers, when their teaching is reduced to rote and drill test practices, and to teaching to the test, so that students and schools will look good in (inter)national benchmarks pictures, schools do a great job in miseducating students, as there is no time for critical and creative work (DARDER, 2015; ORELUS, 2014). Nowadays, more than ever, progressive teachers need to be aware of the slyness that dominant ideology uses to state the neutrality of education; from that reactionary point of view, in the 'neutral space' that is the classroom, students are *trained* to apolitical practices (FREIRE, 2013, p. 95) and teachers are faith believers in the value of the pretence technical and quantifiable objectivity that brands their work. For they will create the same conditions for all students, regardless of who they are, where they come from, what their aspirations and strengths are, who they want to become... The dominant neoliberal ideology stresses quality and excellence as value-free, as we apparently live in a world where equality prevails and where it makes no sense to talk about social class, racism, sexism, injustices or social inequalities, let alone relate these with school failure (SANTOMÉ, 2006, p. 30).

Santomé (2017) evidences how current educational reforms have been producing neoliberal, conservative and neo-colonial personalities. The neoliberal individual lives are obsessed with the search for self-fulfilment, constantly in competition and in comparison with others; s/he is guided by market ideas when it comes to planning his/ her life, running it in cost-benefit terms; s/he assumes a positivist rationality, regarding knowledge as objective, neutral, quantifiable, standardized; s/he perceives economic, entrepreneurial, and technocratic rationality and decisions as unpolitical; s/he is an authoritarian person, lacking content, procedures, and social values that promote common good and social justice. On the other hand, this author continues, the conservative human being lives in the present,

with disregard for the course of history and the lessons we could learn from it; s/he is resigned and patient, as life is made of suffering, what prevents him/her from expressing indignation and rebellion when facing injustice, austerity, labor exploitation, and alienated work; s/he believes that ends justify means, like imposing a particular religious worldview upon others, so that 'evil' ideologies such as anarchy, socialism or communism cannot take place; s/he imposes renounce and resignation on women both in the family and work space, etc. In addition, Santomé (2017) identifies the neocolonial individual as constantly romanticizing the past, judging as superior all forms of scientific and cultural production of the hegemonic nations; s/he ignores or despises all kind of knowledge and symbols of peoples without territory or Stateless nations, even hating oneself for not being able to erase all traces that identify him/herself with his/ her ethnic origins; s/he is capable of mobilization when in face of injustices and terrorist acts that affect *us*, however silent towards those that are perpetrated against *the others*. He states (SANTOMÉ, 2017).

> The educational system plays an important role in building this kind of mentality and of common sense [neo-colonial], as the cultural content that the curriculum project incorporates as its central element, is decisive to place in front of the students' eyes bits of reality, explanations of how the world is, the whys and aspirations on how it should be. (pp. 99-100, my translation)

This ideology works really well in pushing particular groups into the epistemic abyss (SANTOS, 2008): those students whose cultures are silenced by the official curriculum: the feminine world; infancy, youth, the elderly; sick, disabled people; gay, lesbian, and transsexual cultures; working classes and poverty; the suburban, rural and maritime world; Nations without a State; ethnic or powerless minorities; Oriental or 3rd world countries; religions other than Christianity, agnosticism, and atheism (SANTOMÉ, 2011, p. 226). In this neoliberal, conservative and neo-colonial scenario, bilingual/ bicultural students take the greatest toll.

The invisibility of bilingual/ bicultural students in (Portuguese) schools

In Portugal, there is a universal offer of 2 foreign languages – English is compulsory from grade 3 until 11th grade; a second foreign language is offered from grade 7 until grade 9, and it is mostly French, followed by Spanish. German can also be offered, but it is residual nowadays. Recently Mandarin is being tested as an optional language for secondary education. Bilingual education is regarded as distinct from mainstream curriculum learning in school and usually offered for the socially privileged, as there is no bilingual provision

offered in the Portuguese public system, even though it is offered in some (exclusive) private schools (mostly the pairs Portuguese-English; Portuguese-French, and Portuguese-German).

In the public system, all newly arrived migrant students whose mother tongue is not Portuguese are tested for their language proficiency in the language of instruction, similarly to what happens in most European countries (EUROPEAN COMMISSION/ EACEA/EURYDICE, 2017). Then, according to their proficiency in the language of instruction[ii] they attend pull-out classes of Portuguese as a second language, along with tutorials with school teachers. All bilingual students have to learn the academic subjects in Portuguese, and be assessed in Portuguese as well[iii].

International studies show that being migrant, poor and speaking a home language other than the language of instruction are high-risk factors (OECD, 2012). Thus, proficiency in the language of instruction is a literacy, social justice, and equity issue that all national schooling systems should into account. Currently there are 51.128 foreign students in primary and secondary schools in Portugal (3.5% of the total school population for these levels) (DGEEC, 2017a). The great majority come from Portuguese-speaking countries: Brazil, Cape Verde, Angola, and from other Portuguese-speaking African countries. However, there are also significant numbers that possess a different first language, like those coming from Spain, Ukraine, Romenia, China or France (DGEEC, 2017a).

In a survey study that reports to the school year of 2012/13 (MADEIRA et al., 2013), there were a total of 9240 second language students in non-tertiary education in Portugal (1,8% of the total students in the 270 inquired school clusters), with 95 different nationalities and speaking 76 different first languages; the majority are Cape-Verdian (15,8%), Portuguese (10,6%), Romenian (9,4%), Ukrainian (9,2%) and Guinean (8,9%), (MADEIRA ET AL., 2013). Even though Portuguese as a second language is an emerging field of research in Portugal, we know that the prevailing model for these students is a 'sink-or-swim' one (VIEIRA; MOREIRA; PERALTA, 2014, 2015); classes of Portuguese as a second language only function if there is a minimum of 10 students in the same level at the school, which means that many students are excluded from appropriate language support. In the study mentioned earlier (MADEIRA et al., 2013), it was found that only 24% of students whose level of proficiency in Portuguese is too low for successful schooling attended regular classes and did not get any additional support for Portuguese as a second language. They also do not get any instruction in their first language. Recent research signals a growing awareness of the sociolinguistic landscape and underlines the need for knowing more about the school population, non-formal schooling contexts, teachers' qualifications, learner

needs, and successful practices that would inform educational innovation at the policy and practical levels, namely as regards teacher education (VIEIRA; MOREIRA; PERALTA, 2014, 2015). In sum, foreign languages as curriculum subjects enjoy a much higher status than the languages spoken by non-native students (VIEIRA; MOREIRA; PERALTA, 2015, p. 222).

The low status of minority and immigrated languages has negative implications for the students' academic performance. Across the OECD countries, "the completion rate for non-immigrant students is higher than for first-generation immigrants (those born outside the country and whose both parents were born in another country, excluding international students) and for second-generation immigrants (those born in the country and whose both parents were born in another country)" (OECD, 2017, p. 157). Even though Portugal has been improving in the indicators for the inclusion of immigrants generally (OLIVEIRA; GOMES, 2017), in what comes to school academic achievement, the panorama mirrors the situation in other European countries, with native students consistently performing better than immigrants (OLIVEIRA; GOMES, 2016).

Generally, the quality of schools that migrant children attend is below national standards, but this is more often related to local income levels generally than to migrant status in particular (KLUGMAN, 2009). Notwithstanding, when we look at schools in high needs, poor areas in Portugal, we tend to find a majority of immigrant (mostly black people from African countries) and ethnic minority groups (cf. CASA-NOVA, 2005, MARQUES; MARTINS, 2012). The largest ethnic minority group in Portugal – Roma or, as they call themselves, the Gypsy[iv] - are also the ones that live in the most fragile housing conditions[v] and present the highest levels of school retention: 37.4% in primary education, 51% in lower secondary education, and 31.3% in upper secondary education (DGEEC, 2017b). A recent study undertaken by the Portuguese Ministry of Education revealed that only 256 individuals are enrolled in upper secondary education (DGEEC, 2017b), while the (informal) estimates for higher education are for 29 individuals only[vi]. In addition to the high levels of academic underachievement, grade repetition, and school drop-out in compulsory education[vii] (CASA-NOVA, 2006), Roma children and their families display an alienation from school that shares the features already evidenced in many other countries (CASA-NOVA, 2008, WILKIN et al. 2010). When Roma children are included within mainstream schools, these are often poorly provided for, or become "ghettoised" (CASA-NOVA, 2006, ECRI, 2002, MENDES, 2012), often subjected to institutional racism and cultural bias (SANTOMÉ, 2017).

These students are mostly Portuguese-born, so they speak the language of instruction. However, many also speak the gypsy-language (*Caló*, a Romani language spoken by

Iberian gypsies) or Spanish as a language spoken within the family, which, along with their material conditions and socioeconomic status, places them alongside with other second language students, with similar difficulties in using the academic varieties of the language of instruction and thus in succeeding in schooling. The national curriculum for compulsory education does not include anything of their historical, cultural or social reality, even though they have been living in the country for more than 500 years. Therefore Roma students are the most invisible students in Portuguese schools, whilst Roma knowledge and culture is in the deepest realm of the epistemic abyss (cf. PARASKEVA, 2011, 2016, SANTOS, 2008).

Educating teachers for (in)visible children

Regarding teacher education, the State mandated profiles and the teacher recruitment groups do not preview a role in the schooling system for the second language teacher; bilingual education, multi/intercultural education, scaffolding, differentiated instruction for second language learners… are very much unfamiliar to the preparation of the average Portuguese teacher. Master and PhD programs take these aspects into consideration, but at the level of teacher preparation they are almost non-existent.

Thus, in my perspective, Portuguese teacher education has been failing to balance the necessary commitment to a social justice agenda with the practical preparation for effective teaching in complex and difficult schools in underserved areas. It is often a difficult dialogue to engage with teachers the reconceptualization of their knowledge towards the assumption of an agenda for the realization of a more decent and democratic society. Too often teacher thinking on the structural inequalities in the education of bilingual/ bicultural children enters the realm of 'oppressive common sense' (KUMASHIRO, 2004), of 'epistemological blindness' (OLIVEIRA, 2007), naturalizing their invisibility in Portuguese schools. As one teacher wrote,

> There is a suspicion that there are always «hidden forces» that stand in the way of universal access to academic success (whether individual capabilities, social class, economic index, housing quality, the market, text difficulty, the color of the skin, the country of origin, religion, political power, democracy, political ideology, language, etc.). This is a systemic starting point that aims at an accusation, imposes an analysis and leads to an outcome that (…) is always the exposure of the obstructing factors [for academic success]. (…) To mentally work with binary oppositions like good students vs. bad students, native students vs. migrant students, rich students vs. poor students is almost as useful as watching a football game and thinking that players are «deprived», because when teaching we are not thinking that this student is white or colored, is poor or rich, is gypsy or migrant… (T1, July, 2014, in-service course)[viii]

These teacher's words evidence what May and Sleeter (2010) denounce as the shortcomings of the work in critical curriculum theory and in teacher education:

> … practitioners are still more likely to struggle with critical multiculturalism that with liberal multi-culturalism, for several reasons. First, liberalism is far more prominent in mainstream ideology than critical perspectives (…) educators tend not to question assumptions of liberal multiculturalism, or recognize them as questionable. Second (…) much of the theoretical work in critical multiculturalism, as with other critical work, is conceptually dense, with relatively few illustrations of what this looks like in practice. (p. 12)

Therefore, in teacher education, the *language of practice* is much better appropriated and much preferred over the *language of theory* (DARDER, 2015), as the latter is a much more difficult "critical language of social analysis" (p. 185), one that goes against common sense language and practice and prevailing epistemological platforms. This partially explains teachers' resistance to the critical analysis of the schooling situation of bilingual/ bicultural minorities and of the epistemologies underlying it. Furthermore, Portuguese teachers are also embracing the ideology informing the diverse national equivalents of the English-only movement in the US; the colonial legacy is still pervasive when teachers are not capable of looking at their students' home languages as important or worthwhile teaching – only colonial languages are. In a short in-service teacher education course that I coordinated, when asked about their own images of prestigious languages, teachers signalled English, followed by their mother language (Portuguese) and another colonial language: Spanish. Their students' mother tongues (like Ukrainian, Romenian or Cape Verde Creoule) take the place of subordinate languages, of languages with less power and status, as they were not valued by their teachers as worthwhile teaching and learning.

However, when they problematize teaching, learning, and assessment conditions, teachers find themselves at a crossroads; the absence of 'linguistically responsive' pedagogy (LUCAS; VILLEGAS, 2011) or of a 'critical bicultural pedagogy' (DARDER, 2015) in the schools and in their classrooms, is very much justified by the length of the syllabi, by a standardized curriculum, and by the prevalence of 'teaching to the test' classroom practices. School education is clearly being high jacked by the hegemonic neoliberal movements of standardization, by "behavioral objectives, sciences, and learning theory" (PARASKEVA, 2016, p. 188) that disempower both students and teachers. As an English language teacher wrote, when asked to write about multiculturalism and equity in Portuguese schools,

> Curricula are far bigger than we can take for each school year and sometimes that leaves no time to teachers *to deviate from the curriculum to talk about specific and different examples of the real life that are really useful for each student's needs* (…). Also, I know

it is very difficult with our timetables and number of students but how is it possible to evaluate all our students the same way? They are all so different, they have so many different abilities, they are exposed to so many different realities and in the end I give them a single test to evaluate all of them the same way? Is it fair to do this? Is this equality or equity? (T2, February 2017, Course Unit, my emphasis)

Paraskeva's (2011) analysis is particularly insightful here to unveil the structural forces at work that contribute to subtractive schooling for all children, but mainly for particular disempowered groups:

The current dominant forces of education and curriculum have shown an unprecedented absence of responsibility by systematically refusing to think about schooling as being impeded by certain taboos. Schooling issues such as assessment, subject matter, hours of attendance, textbooks, and the knowledge being transmitted are wrongly accepted as dogma. Such a limited vision makes it almost impossible to have an education and a curriculum outside a particular framework that is bounded by issues related to standards, classification, objectives, disciplinary orthodoxy, and competences—in other words, the official curriculum language. It is a dangerous fact that you cannot have schooling without meeting such conditions. In this regard, Bourdieu's (2001) analysis is helpful. He argues that the official language has been imposed on the whole population as the only legitimate language, and that it is produced and maintained not only by the authors who claim the authority to write, but by the dominant curriculum forces that codify it and the teachers whose task is to teach based on that language. (p. 175)

In the much needed task of decodifying structural forces at work and "exercising critical judgement in the resistance to the sly power of ideology" (FREIRE, 2013, p. 130, transl.), the critique of assessment practices plays a key role. Two other English and Spanish language teachers, reflecting on the constraints felt during their intent to develop critical abilities, cooperative work, intercultural awareness, and citizenship education with their students, state:

One last aspect to point out as a constraint is the predominant presence of summative evaluation with written tests in the primary school. Even though the school cluster and the different departments have not imposed a particular assessment model, and I had the freedom to implement several continuous assessment strategies and tools, it was expected that the English subject would follow the same written test procedures, following the same format, in the same timing (…). The weight of these written tests was debated in a department meeting; it weighed more than direct observation or other elements of continuous assessment. It was assumed that they are a valid assessment tool and that they would ensure the same procedure in all primary school subjects. Even though I believe and defended that assessment goes well beyond testing (…) the fact that a summative assessment test was expected to take place (…) influenced the way I had to assess my students, and thus, the way they perceive assessment of linguistic performance. (T3, February, 2017, Practicum Report)

In my perspective, one should change the prevailing assessment paradigm that still continues to give great importance to summative assessment through written tests. As an example, in [the practicum school] assessment criteria made by the language department states the following percentages: for cognition - 70% for written tests, 5% for written tasks and 15% for oral comprehension, production and interaction. The remaining 10% are given to attitudes and values. (T4, January 2018, Practicum Report)

Given that academic language takes much longer to acquire and develop than conversational language, besides being associated with much more cognitively demanding tasks (see CUMMINS, 1991), this type of assessment – unfortunately this picture mirrors very accurately the reality of school assessment in Portugal (cf. CNE, 2015) – is damaging to all students, especially for bilingual/ bicultural students. Bearing in mind the situation of migrants and Roma children depicted above, the excessive focus on literacy assessment (reading and writing) makes it harder for these children to get good results. Oracy is secondary to a highly traditional and positivist curriculum and assessment; by overvaluing writing, curriculum epistemicides (cf. PARASKEVA, 2011; 2016) occur within schools, as several minority communities' knowledge is embedded and derived from oral traditions and cultural productions that originate in different parts of the globe. The academic outcomes are obvious: when school knowledge and schooling modes of production and assessment of that knowledge keep producing "a myriad of other forms of episteme (…) as non-existent" (PARASKEVA, 2015, p. 18), keep being blind to the ecology of epistemologies present in schooling settings (cf. OLIVEIRA, 2007, 2012, 2017) the academic gap, therefore the social gap, will endure if not widen.

In addition, the hyper-rationality and increased accountability (cf. ZEICHNER, 2018) that characterizes educational assessment and evaluation practices mask the push towards the de-professionalization of the teaching profession, as high-stakes assessment is currently shaping curriculum and daily instruction more than ever. As Au (2012a) puts it, "our classrooms and schools are becoming testing dystopias where our abilities to effectively teach children are being distorted and marred by high-stakes testing", as "politicians on both sides of the aisle and their supporters continue to uphold high-stakes tests as the cure for what ails education. The problem is: Their cure is killing us." (p. 77). Wayne Au could be very well writing about Portugal. As the National Council of Education recognizes (CNE, 2015), even though literature and research clearly select formative assessment as the main assessment mode that should guide educational action, school culture and schooling practices in Portugal still privilege summative assessment and standardized testing:

> This tendency is embedded in an educational system where an overwhelming 'grade culture' prevails, without the corresponding concern in the processes that promote learning. Practice is impregnated in this culture, first and foremost with the tradition – without any parallel in other educational systems – of compulsory public display of individual grades with student identification, arising from internal assessment, under the pretenses of transparency, but with questionable effects in the perception of results on students and their families. (…)
> The assessment culture, more oriented towards classifying and ranking, deepens the disciplinary and punishing character of assessment, instead of re-centering its focus in

detecting difficulties, with a view to determining the appropriate course of action to solving them… (CNE, 2015, p. 10, my translation)

It is time to take a look at another experienced language teacher's testimonial on assessment practices:

> … why do we keep ignoring the bad performance of a class in the scarce written assessment moments [tests] to subjugate this information, that is paramount to the regulation of teaching and learning, to the urgency of completing the syllabi? Should not one expect that, according to the regulations and the ethical rigour that is required in a school for all, this information would sustain "the support of learning" instead? And how can a paper and pencil assessment come out as legitimate, reliable, and rigorous to measure a diversity of competences, of learning situations, and of multiple cognitive processes developed by the students? Having arrived at the 21st century, 26 years later after [the publication of a norm that defines formative assessment as the primary mode of assessment], a conception of assessment as measure, focused on the role and power of the teacher that ignores the centrality of the learning individual still prevails. And thus external assessment certifies the breach of the law. (T5, April 2018)

Teachers notice the pervasive effects of techno-rational and positivist epistemologies in shaping school practices; they are also very much vocal on this – they denounce the students' frustration, boredom, and difficult behavior, against those who advocate more accountability and rigour in schools worldwide (see DANDREA, 2012, DARDER, 2015; OLIVEIRA; MOREIRA, 2014, SCHIEBLE, 2012; WUERTH, 2012, among many others). As Schieble (2012) poignantly states,

> I've heard praise for the British system - how 'accountable' teachers are there, and how equitable it is to have a 'rigorous' and uniform curriculum. Well, I've seen this future, and it's not so great. Teachers will spend even more time on test prep. Inequality will become more pronounced. Students' behavior will deteriorate as they rebel against an empty curriculum. Fewer and fewer students will be exposed to material that encourages them to reflect critically about social issues. (p. 54)

As this teacher, I believe we all have seen this future (already in the present)… and it is not so great. Current assessment practices are the cherry on the schooling cake: the prevailing "epistemological blindness" (OLIVEIRA, 2007) in mainstream curricula, coupled with the techno-positivist rationality underlying assessment form the perfect educational storm. Educational researchers and teacher educators should provide examples on how schooling systems worldwide keep failing most students in public schools, but mainly bilingual/ bicultural students of low income backgrounds, in order to enhance the critical analysis of the pervasive effects on the neoliberal, neoconservative, and neocolonial inheritance in schools today (cf. SANTOMÉ, 2017) and thus paving the way to transformation.

Recently, in a class where I asked my teacher candidates to read Wayne Au's text (2009) on his experience as a bilingual and bicultural student in school in the USA and

describe a similar experience, as well as comment of the desired profile of the (foreign/ second) language teacher, one student teacher wrote:

> I remember on one of my history lessons, on 9th grade, when we were being taught on how Christopher Columbus reached America, and how that became one of the biggest accomplishments in the world. I remember being taught how the Native Americans were not fighting back; in fact, they were curious about the "white men". I also remember being taught how the "white men" were not so nice towards the Native Americans. The white men brought death with them: violence, sickness, enslavement, rape and pillage, until the Native Americans ran away from their lands and hid in places we now call Indian Reservations, as most of the Native American tribes were reduced to nothing. What is truly saddening is that during those history lessons, we were taught that these expeditions from Europe to America were somehow essential, as the "white man" had to civilize the natives. But why did it have to happen? Were the deaths of all those people just so the Europeans could prosper? Why was that a good thing? It simply was not. These history lessons made me think about how this part of history was taught in America, in classes where the majority of students are white, with perhaps one or two Native American students, I thought about how they must feel, when being told that their ancestors dying was necessary for them to become civilized, for other people to prosper at their deaths and submission. And this is just one example about how the education in Portugal is still very behind, because I just referred one ethnicity that is not present in Portugal, but what about black people living in Portugal? Or the Roma people? They certainly do live in our country, and I do not recall one time when their culture was referred or respected.
>
> Although I cannot speak for other subjects like history, I can speak for English lessons. When teaching English to children I do not want them to get the idea that English is original from the United Kingdom and that only white people live there. I want them to leave my classes knowing that the UK is a country filled with multiple cultures and ethnicities who form the country that is today the UK. In that way, the role of teaching a foreign language is not only to teach the target language, but also to teach about who speaks that language and their multitude of cultures and different skin colours.
>
> To be able to become a multiculturally aware teacher, it is important not to have a monologue during the class, where the main focus is the textbook and what has been written there. The teacher has to be able to hear the students, and make them talk to each other and expose their own opinions, as it is essential to not only not miseducate white students but also include students from different ethnicities, in a way that they do not feel like their identity is under attack. School plays a crucial role on students' lives, as it needs to create a space for them to meaningfully understand each other. A multicultural lesson is a lesson that is without a doubt more rigorous, as it has added views from different perspectives, which combats what has been one of the biggest problems in our society - racism.
>
> A truly knowledgeable and competent teacher is a teacher who is culturally aware, as they know that there is a myriad of ways of understanding the world that are influenced by space and social status, they should also be able to positively relay those different perspectives. The teacher

should also be able to face the fact that their class has students who are distinct from each other, and they have different ways of learning and understanding, and that they possess different ways of living, different perspectives that deserve to be listened and honored. Additionally, this knowledge that the students already have from their personal lives should be applied in their classes, where the teacher familiarizes them with what they already know plus, at the same time, teaching them information they still do not know, but that it can be easily added to the already existing knowledge. (T6, February 2018, Course Unit)

As this teacher candidate's testimonial shows, schooling education and teacher education in Portugal needs to be deterritorialized, as it still is held hostage to neoliberal, colonial, and techno rational Western, Eurocentric ways of thinking (cf. PARASKEVA, 2011, 2016; SANTOMÉ, 2017). As Freire (1975) puts it, banking education, where students are expected to regurgitate the information passed onto them by their teachers, is anything but democratic education. The 'banking' educator does not ask questions about the content of the dialogue to be established with her/his students – there is no such thing as dialogue; instead, s/he is more interested in the content of the syllabus which s/he will lecture to students; and s/he will find her/his own answers to his/her questions on the content by organizing her/ his own syllabus (FREIRE, 1975, pp. 119-120). However, when education is conceived as a practice of freedom, it is intrinsically dialogic and the educator asks him/herself questions about the content of the dialogue, that should be "an organized, systematized, and a value-added devolution to the students of what they aspire to know better" (FREIRE, 1975, p.120, my translation). To this end, the struggle against curriculum epistemicides and against epistemological blindness is needed, in order to assume that (an)other knowledge(s) is/are possible and to extend past the Western, Eurocentric epistemological platform, paying attention to other forms of knowledge (PARASKEVA, 2016, p. 43), namely the knowledge that is present and emerges from the critical analysis of everyday practices of teachers and students in schools (OLIVEIRA, 2007, 2012, 2017) when school teachers academic staff work together to find answers to common issues and concerns within a social and cognitive justice epistemological framework (SÜSSEKIND; GARCIA, 2011, MOREIRA, 2011, OLIVEIRA, 2010, OLIVEIRA; SÜSSEKIND, 2016; VIEIRA, 2014).

Conclusion

I started this text with the question "Who exactly has been benefiting from the Western form of democracy?", asked by Peter Orelus (2014, p. 57), when he, with Noam Chomsky,

analyse the educational situation of bilingual students in US schools. When large 'silent minorities' (cf. GREENE, 2003) have historically been forbidden to learn (or even speak) their home languages at schools, have lost the right to speak and be heard, "the concept of democracy becomes more of an illusion than a reality" (ORELUS, 2014, p. 56). As many authors have poignantly pointed out, there is no more effective domination of a people than through killing one's mother tongue and replacing it with the language of the oppressor, a form of colonial power that still endures nowadays (cf. WA THIONG'O, 1986 *apud* PARASKEVA, 2016; QUIJANO, 2000).

As stated by Santos (2008), the asymmetry of knowledges that comes with the prevailing Western, Eurocentric knowledge paradigm and how these knowledges relate to one another is an epistemological difference that manifests itself not only as such, but also as a political difference that, in its utmost form, leads to epistemological fascism (see also PARASKEVA, 2011, 2016; SÜSSEKIND, 2017). This paradigm has a real effect in the way it colonizes reason and produces distorted views of the (bilingual/ bicultural) other (cf. QUIJANO, 2000) in language teachers' interpretive frameworks. In their narratives, many times teachers reproduce hegemonic representations of languages and cultures that are associated with more social capital and a higher economic currency and with conservative and neocolonial perspectives on the value of languages. But they also disclose the high jacking of public school education by the neoliberal movements of standardization and marketization of education, movements that build their strength also from the prevailing positivist and techno-rational epistemological paradigm and from the inability of teacher education to disrupt the omnipresent epistemological blindness in curricula and schooling practices. For students who are left behind, but also for many others for whom the school, the curriculum and assessment, as it is, no longer make much sense, there is an urgent need to go beyond the current Western, Eurocentric, neocolonial, patriarchal and conservative epistemology (APPLE, 2000; PARASKEVA, 2016; SANTOMÉ, 2017; SANTOS, 2008). This epistemology produces distorted and oppressing knowledge paradigms that value certain types of rationalities, cultures and social groups, while depriving all others of their rightful place in the history of humanity's cultural production (QUIJANO, 2000).

So, we need the decolonial turn proclaimed by Paraskeva (2016, p. 201): in order to know what we do not know, we need to know more about *the different other*; know more of the kind of knowledge (scientific included) considered inferior, including that produced by bilingual/ bicultural students and their families' funds of knowledge (cf. GONZÁLEZ; MOLL; AMANTI, 2005) and to advocate for their rights to a democratic and inclusive education

(BARTOLOMÉ, 2010, DARDER, 2015, ESTRADA; CHACÓN, 2015, LUCAS; VILLEGAS, 2011, SKUTBNABB-KANGAS ET AL., 2009, among many others). We need to rescue the epistemic value of curriculum and everyday school-life studies in producing both global and local understandings and solutions to pressing educational issues and needs (OLIVEIRA, 2007, 2017) in the education of disadvantaged students. We also need to recognize that educational institutions produce ignorant ways of knowing that are often disguised as undisputed truths, thus failing to perceive these "truths and certainties" as historically situated, culturally contested, subconsciously reproduced, and politically motivated (MALEWSKI; JARAMILLO, 2011, p. 6). In what comes to the education of bilingual/ bicultural students, we can start by exposing all students to languages other than the language of instruction (English/ Portuguese), including students' first languages, in schooling daily practices. As I tried to evidence, taking the case of Portugal, learning a second or third language (a common situation in current European schooling systems) is not enough.

As a teacher educator, it has been my concern to balance the goals of a critical perspective with an 'effectiveness' orientation, focusing on the forms of pedagogy that will develop basic literacy skills, as assessed by standardized tests, while expanding students' personal, intellectual, and academic horizons in transformative ways (cf. CUMMINS, 2000, p. 248). Therefore, in addition to facilitating the so necessary technical skills, my role as a teacher educator has been to include also the explicit study of the role of ideology and of political commitments in shaping the curriculum, as well as an analysis of the way power relations operate, explicitly addressing issues of oppression and injustice, thus encouraging teachers to become agents of change (BARTOLOMÉ, 2010, ZEICHNER, 2009, ZEICHNER; FLESSNER, 2009). I strive to include in teacher preparation and in-service education curricula a need to explicitly explore how ideology functions to hide the asymmetries of power relations and the distribution of both cultural and economic capital (BARTOLOMÉ, 2007). To that end, teacher narratives function as powerful heuristic tools for developing a language of theory (cf. DARDER, 2015, MOREIRA, 2011), tools that will support the critical analysis of schooling and teacher education practices.

The characterization of the situation of bilingual/ bicultural children in Portugal points out to the need for designing teacher education curricula that will include and validate the voices of marginalized groups in education against the hegemonic voices of others (cf. APPLE, 2000, AU, 2012b; ZEICHNER; FLESSNER, 2009). Only then can school education be better able to counteract the stigma and dispossession of particular social groups whilst strengthening the recognition of their cultural, linguistic, and social heritage. However,

perhaps more importantly, mapping the terrain will increase schools and teachers' awareness of the richness of their linguistic and cultural capital and how it can be used to improve the educational quality of *all* students' learning experiences. It is not enough to educate teachers to become more culturally competent and work towards making schools more socially just places; there is also need to rethink curriculum in a *non-abyssal* manner for these students, bringing cognitive justice to schooling and counteracting colonial and oppressive heritages in curriculum development and teacher education (SANTOS, 2008, PARASKEVA, 2016). In order to effectuate this epistemological turn, Oliveira's analysis (2007) of the prevailing "epistemological blindness" in curriculum studies and her proposal for the recognition of a new ecology of knowledges in everyday school-life studies (OLIVEIRA, 2017) is an important step further into recognizing the limits of 'traditional' academic scholarship and into building a more democratic school and teacher education.

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[i] A draft version of this paper was presented at the AERA 2018 (New York, April 13-17).

[ii] A1 to B1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). These are regarded as beginning and pre-intermediate levels of proficiency in the language which are not regarded as appropriate to follow a school curriculum.

[iii] For more thorough information on language education policies in Europe, including Portugal, see European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2017).

[iv] Estimated at between 40.000 and 50.000 individuals almost 16 years ago (ECRI, 2002). There is no reliable data currently available, as the national law does not allow for the cultural, racial or ethnic identification of citizens.

[v] See https://www.publico.pt/2018/03/14/sociedade/noticia/associacoes-de-ciganos-querem-ajudar-a-evitar-a-segregacao-1806689

[vi] https://www.publico.pt/2018/04/09/sociedade/noticia/quase-duplicou-o-numero-de-alunos-ciganos-na-escola-obrigatoria-1808751

[vii] Compulsory education in Portugal is currently comprised of 12 years of schooling.

[viii] Most quotations from teachers are translations from the Portuguese.

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