Who benefits from Western forms of language teacher education?

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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", Orelus ends up stating (2014, p. 56).

This texts discusses how modern Western European epistemicidium (cf. Paraskeva 2011, 2016; Santos, 2008) works in Portuguese schools and in language teacher education in what comes to bilingual/ bicultural students. It draws on critical theory and pedagogy (Au, 2012; Darder, 2015; Freire, 1975; 2013; Paraskeva, 2011, 2016; Torres 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.

Working through the notions of critical teacher education (Zeichner & Flessner, 2009) and educational research as bricolage (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004), the study aims at exploring 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" (p. 20). Resorting to a purposive sample of the narratives of two groups of

language teachers, both beginning and experienced language teachers, produced within pre-service and in-service teacher education programs at the University of Minho, critical discourse analysis (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) was 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. 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 picture, 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). The dominant 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 (Torres Santomé, 2006, p. 30).

Recently, Torres Santomé (2017) evidences how current educational reforms have been producing neoliberal, conservative and neo-colonial personalities. The neoliberal individual lives 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; perceives economic, entrepreneurial, and technocratic rationality and decisions as unpolitical; 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; 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; imposes renounce and resignation on women both in the family and work space. Finally, Torres Santomé (2017) identifies the neocolonial individual as constantly romanticizing the past, judging as superior all forms of 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; 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 (Torres Santomé, 2017).

> The educational system plays an important role in building this kind of mentality and of common sense [neo-colonial], as 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, transl.)

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. 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[1]. Bilingual education is offered in some (exclusive) private schools (mostly the pairs Portuguese-English; Portuguese-French, and Portuguese-German – recently, Portuguese-Chinese Mandarin). In the public system, only pull-out classes of Portuguese as a non-native language is offered, along with tutorials with Portuguese teachers. And that's it. All bilingual (/bicultural) students have to learn the academic subjects in Portuguese, and be assessed in Portuguese as well, regardless of their proficiency level.

In addition to maintaining bilingual students' home languages in a subaltern and subordinate place (cf. Chomsky cit. in Orelus, 2014, p. 59; Cummins & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988), the official curriculum heightens the symbolic violence by operating a selection of aims, content, resources, teaching and assessment procedures that, combined with the nature of teacher-student and student-student relationships, places these students in the other side of the epistemic abyss, in the realm of curriculum invisibility.

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[1] There are some experiences on Mandarin-Portuguese and English-Portuguese, sponsored by the Ministry of Education in both public and private schools, mainly resorting to CLIL, but these are residual.

Let's analyse the example of the largest ethnic minority group in Portugal – Roma or, as they call themselves, the Gypsy[2]. Currently there is no reliable data regarding the educational situation of ethnic minority groups in Portugal. Key data disaggregated by ethnicity on the situation of Roma and Traveler children in schools is currently missing[3], which renders effective assessment of existing policies and practices difficult (Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 2012).

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, 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). Roma children present the highest levels of academic underachievement, grade repetition, and school drop-out in compulsory education (Casa-Nova, 2006), displaying an alienation from school that shares the features already evidenced in many other countries (Casa-Nova, 2008; Leite, 2002; Wilkin et al. 2010). Where Roma children are included within mainstream schools, these are often poorly provided for, or become "ghettoised" (Casa-Nova, 2006; ECRI, 2002; Mendes, 2012), subjected to institutional racism and cultural bias (Torres Santomé, 2017). The National Strategy for the Integration of Gypsy Communities in Portugal[4] recognizes that the society at large has been unable (or unwilling) to provide for their effective inclusion and access to the same material and symbolic services and goods that the majority has.

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

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[2] Estimated between 40.000 and 50.000 individuals (ECRI, 2002).

[3] As the Eurydice report states (2010), a considerable number of countries in Europe make no attempt to identify the ethnic status of students – among those countries we find Portugal. Racial or ethnic identification is prohibited by national data protection legislation.

[4] Council of Ministers' Resolution 25/ 2013, April 17.

gypsies) or Spanish as the language mostly 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 successful schooling. In addition, the national curriculum for compulsory education (non-tertiary 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. Roma children are the most invisible children 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 (TE), the State mandated profiles and recruitment groups do not even preview a place for the second language (SL) teacher[5]; bilingual education, multi/intercultural education, scaffolding, differentiated instruction for SL learners… are very much foreign to the average Portuguese teacher. Master and PhD programs take these aspects into consideration, but at the level of teacher preparation or in-service TE 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 reconceptualise teacher thinking 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

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[5] It only describes the profile for foreign language (world language) teachers for teaching the European languages already identified.

of 'oppressive common sense' (Kumashiro, 2004), 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[6])

As May & Sleeter (2010, p. 12) state, the task is never an easy one:

> … practitioners are still more likely to struggle with critical multiculturalism that with liberal multiculturalism, 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)

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 (cf. Kumashiro, 2004). This partially explains teachers' resistance to the critical analysis of the schooling situation of bilingual/ bicultural minorities. 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

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

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 a place of subordinate languages, of languages with less power and status, as they were not sufficiently 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 and the prevalence of 'teaching to the test' classroom practices. School education is being high jacked by the hegemonic neoliberal movements of standardization, "by behavioral objectives, sciences, and learning theory" (Paraskeva, 2016, pp. 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)

Paraskeva's (2011) analysis is particularly insightful here to unveil the schooling structural forces at work:

> 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)

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 language teaching in Portugal – is damaging to all students, especially for bilingual/ bicultural students. Bearing in mind the situation of Roma children depicted above, or of migrants, 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, epistemicides (cf. Paraskeva, 2011; 2016) occur within schools, as several minority communities' knowledge is embedded and derived from oral traditions. 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) the academic gap, therefore the social gap, will endure if not widen.

Recently, in a class where I asked my teacher candidates to read Wayne Au's text (2009) and describe a similar experience, as well as comment of the desired profile of the 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 Romani 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 to not only teach the target language, but also 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 to not 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 to 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. (T5, 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 ways of thinking (cf. Paraskeva, 2011, 2016; Torres 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, transl.). The still prevailing Western European knowledge paradigm 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. But they also disclose the high jacking of public school education by the neoliberal movements of standardization and marketization of education, 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 the (inter)national benchmarks picture.

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 implied, 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 cit. in Paraskeva, 2016; Quijano, 2000). 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 in the realms of bilingual/ bicultural students and their families. 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). We can start, by exposing all students to languages other than the language of instruction (English/ Portuguese), including students' first languages in curriculum daily practice. 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 also include the explicit study of the role of ideology and 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 & Flessner, 2009). I strive to do as Bartolomé (2010) contends: 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." (p. 48)

A sample of narratives produced by both novice and experienced language teachers on teacher education programs at the University of Minho were used to illustrate how modern Western epistemicidium works in schools to undermine progressive and inclusive education for bilingual/ bicultural children. They highlight the difficulties and dilemmas these teachers experience. These dilemmas 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; Torres 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 (Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988).

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 (see Apple, 2000; Au, 2012; Paraskeva, Diniz-Pereira, & Ladson-Billings, 2007; 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. Building on Santos (2008) and Paraskeva's (2015) arguments, 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:

> "In essence, curriculum theory should give voice to an engineering of differences by deterritorializing itself and looking for new ways of thinking and feeling about education. (…)To fight for a deterritorialized curriculum theory and practices that privilege the cult of difference implies the need to understand education as a set of relationships in which the personal and the political play leading roles." (Paraskeva, 2016, p. 194).

Therefore, the critique of the Western epistemology that feeds the metaphorical abyss that renders invisible and silences the 'otherness' in its non-Western side (Santos, 2008; Paraskeva, 2011, 2016) is not only necessary but required. The invisibility (and thus non-existence) of bilingual/bicultural students today can no longer be acritically accepted, as well as the way (language) teacher education is made an accomplice to this epistemicide (cf. Paraskeva, 2016).

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