

EXPERIENCE REPORT: FROM THE SISAL REGION OF BAHIA TO EASTERN EUROPE - INTERCONNECTING SCHOOLS



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ABSTRACT

The present work aims to narrate an experience of cultural and linguistic exchange, which began at Colégio Ação, in the city of Santaluz, Bahia, Brazil, in the 6th grade class of Elementary School Final Grades, during the year 2023 and ended at the *N26 Andrzej Struga* Primary School, in Krakow, Poland this year. To this end, action research was used so that the experiences that are shared here could be encompassed, since this methodology is based on the principle of learning by doing and also allows for collective self-reflection. Therefore, one of the actions of the Cultural and Linguistic Exchange Project was that Brazilian students had the opportunity for cultural exchange through the English language with students from the *N26 Andrzej Struga* Primary School, in Krakow, Poland. In addition, as an English language teacher at the Brazilian school and a participant in the project, I had the opportunity to travel to the old continent, go to Eastern Europe to the city of Krakow, teach and participate in school events during the week of Polish Christmas.

Keywords: Exchange. Pedagogical and Cultural Practices. English language.

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INTRODUCTION

When we think about English language teaching and continuing education of foreign language teachers, it is always important to think of actions that can transcend the classroom and enter the world of linguistic immersion, because spaces where the real use of the language is employed, the construction and strengthening of proficiency in the language studied is rooted, enabling the harvest of good fruits from the language perspective.

In this perspective, we can bring the process of acculturation as a vector of social integration in which the student tends to connect through the language with a certain group of people, native and/or non-native speakers of the language. According to Schumann (1986), for each degree of acculturation there is an equivalent level of second language acquisition. Thus, when the student is socially integrated into a group of speakers of the target language, he improves his contact to the point of acquiring the language under study. For Schumann, the essential component in the acculturation process is socio-psychological contact.

Based on the assumption of social interactions, there are some factors that can influence, such as social values that, according to Schumann, are directly linked to the relationship between the two groups that speak different languages, the group that is learning the target language and the group that speaks the language under study. Social factors involved in these situations of contact between groups can inhibit, affect the process of language acquisition or maximize it (Schumann, 1986).

Thus, when we treat linguistic immersion as an educational approach in the Linguistic and Cultural Interaction Project that will be reported here, we aim to play a leading role in the target language, the language studied, as a primordial factor in the learning process. It is notorious that this method accelerates learning and is widely used in various classroom contexts, bringing benefits such as: increased fluency and proficiency, development of listening and oral comprehension, improving pronunciation and intonation, motivating and increasing confidence in the language, in addition to a wide cultural repertoire acquired. According to Savage and Hughes (2014), research on language acquisition resulting from immersion experiences, in general, has shown that study abroad opportunities positively affect the development of a second language.

During the experience of Cultural and Linguistic Exchange in *an online* and synchronous way, offered by me, an English Language teacher at Colégio Ação, in the city

of Santaluz-BA, in the class of the 6th Year of Elementary School Final Years, I could see the enthusiasm and motivation of the students who participated in the cultural/linguistic exchange with the *N26 Andrzej Struga* Primary School, in Krakow, Poland, in which the importance of actions of this size was highlighted. Because they aim to develop better language proficiency, strengthening practice in different contexts, enabling a better use of the curricular component in the classroom.

From the experience narrated, we can say that it was a partial exchange, as there was only the teacher leaving the country. An immersive environment was created in the city itself, in which the target language can be studied through *online* resources, applications that enabled linguistic and cultural interaction with other nationalities. The immersion also allowed us to level the English language teaching based on the linguistic proficiency of the participants, we can adapt according to the learning objectives of the cultural exchange meetings.

The nature of this work is linked to action research, not only by the presence of a practical internship, but also by the search for strategies that lead to the practical investigation of language proficiency through immersion, enabling intervention and theoretical deepening. "Action research is a term that applies to projects in which practitioners seek to effect transformations in their own practices (Brown; Dowling, 2001, p. 152)".

By producing this experience report, describing the *online* and face-to-face actions of the Linguistic and Cultural Interaction Project guided under my mentorship, in the English language classroom, it is understood that it can intend to promote discussions about the practice of language production in linguistic immersion environments, so that through intensive exposure to the language, learning happens faster, more objectively and meaningfully.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN...

In 2019, October, I had the opportunity to travel to England to take a course on Primary *Methodology and Language*, at the *British Study Centre*, in the city of Oxford, the birthplace of one of the best universities in the world. During the training period, I met several teachers from Eastern Europe, such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. As the days go by, bonds of friendship begin to be established. With the productions and interactions proposed by the course, I met teacher *Anneckzca*, an English Language

teacher at Primary School N26, *Andrzej Struga*, in Krakow, Poland. During the course period, we were also given the opportunity to visit the city of Oxford, allowing us to get to know the city more deeply, the birthplace of great world writers such as: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien and Lewis Carroll.

The *Primary Methodology and Language course* offered by the *British Study Centre*, in Oxford, England, aimed to:

Gain confidence in the use of the English language; critically reflect on the current methodology of language teaching; share ideas and develop as teachers; to increase their awareness of the principles and practices of teaching young students; Evaluate and explore materials and resources for younger learners (Teacher Training 2019, p.10).²

The methodology of the course is based as follows: *Each session employs current language teaching methodology to reflect participants classroom practice. Each session contains language instruction and pedagogic practice. Participants work with all four skills with particular emphasis on speaking and listening* (Teacher Training 2019, p.10). Each session employs a current language teaching methodology to reflect the participants' classroom practice, and contains language instruction and pedagogical practice. Participants work with all four skills, with particular emphasis on speaking and listening.

At the end of the course, we had a very cultural breakfast, the famous British Tea, a tradition that dates back to the nineteenth century, in England, through the Duchess of *Bedford*, who was hungry before dinner and asked for tea, cakes and breads. In this cultural moment we were able to share culinary cultures, learn a little about the production of *Scones* (a specific bread present in English tea) and evaluate the path taken by the participating teachers during the two weeks of classes and cultural tours in Oxford.

At the end of the course and return to Brazil, the bond with the teachers was still established: we exchanged messages, shared teaching practices, shared activities and socialized teaching methods. We often met on *online* calls to practice the English language and socialize in general. Since everyone involved spoke totally different languages, we used the English language as a bridge, social interaction, and effective communication.

² Gain confidence in using the English language; Reflect critically on current language teaching methodology; Share ideas and develop as teachers; Extend their awareness of the principles and practice of teaching to young learners; Evaluate and explore materials and resources for younger learners (Teacher Training 2019, p.10).

In 2023, in one of these calls, the idea of connecting our students through an immersive project came up. We decided to establish this link, bringing the sixth-grade class of Colégio Ação, Santaluz-BA closer to the fifth-grade class of the N26 Primary School, *Andrzej Struga*, in Krakow, Poland. We established strategies for linguistic and cultural exchange via *online* so that we could analyze it later, a month after putting it into practice.

BRIEF REPORT ON THE LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROJECT AT COLÉGIO AÇÃO, SANTALUZ-BA

Lately there has been a lot of talk about cultural and linguistic exchange projects, bringing the word exchange very close, exchange of information, belief, knowledge and culture. In this way, the experience of living in another location, outside their country of origin, provides knowledge of more complex and specific habits, opening new perspectives of worldview for the exchange student, as they need to adapt to the environment, face challenges, strengthen themselves emotionally in relation to cultural shock and take care of issues such as affective bond with the country of origin, so that this vulnerability does not hinder the process.

Exchange programs play a fundamental role in professional expansion and innovation, it is an opportunity for both cultural knowledge and technical-scientific knowledge, with regard to the language studied. The possibilities of linguistic enrichment occur in various ways, such as knowledge of idiomatic expressions, often understood and used only by native speakers of the language, learning slang and local linguistic variations, are factors of growth in the proficiency of the speaker of any language.

According to Sebben (2007, p. 34), "the central idea of exchanges could not be purely of studies, but, more than that, of changing oneself". In the approaches to cultural exchanges, Falteri (1998, p.37) states that:

"Interculturalism" has spread rapidly, because it proposes a dynamic dimension of contact, interaction, exchange, in which diversity counts as an active interlocutor. The term "intercultural", used by the European Council since the early 1980s and therefore adopted in the language of ministerial documents when it decided to address the question of the integration of foreigners in schools, has also been adopted as a unifying horizon by "educations" that in different ways focus on the value of coexistence.

The Brazil-Poland Linguistic and Cultural Interaction project, at Colégio Ação, Santaluz, Bahia, began on April 25, 2023, where we started the first *online* interaction to introduce the children and kick off, through *Google Meet*, *Webcam* and Microphones. We

made the presentation of the teachers, I introduced myself to the Polish class and Professor *Anneckzca* introduced herself to the Brazilian class.

Discovering and interpreting something through science requires more precise investigation of methods suitable for the journey. In our project, we used bibliographic research to acquire enough support to understand the needs of our students regarding language proficiency and comparative cultural studies skills, and then implement actions to solve the problem found, characterizing an intervention.

Thus, according to Vasconcellos (2021, p. 2):

Action research is a type of investigation procedure that follows a cycle between practical action and investigation about it. Thus, within an action research, the action is first planned. Then, what was planned is implemented. The reactions to the change made are observed and described. Then, the effectiveness of the action is evaluated and what can be done to improve the practice. And the cycle starts again.

Still dealing with our project, we followed a few steps before having our first interaction with the Polish school. Soon after meeting the sixth-grade class at Colégio Ação, Santaluz-BA, I realized that they were very busy and needed something that would draw more attention than conventional classes, no matter how well prepared they were. At first, I talked to them about the possibility of connecting *online* with a Polish school, their reactions were better than I imagined, they were very motivated and started to produce more during classes seeking to improve language proficiency to use in *online moments* of cultural exchange.

During some classes at the beginning of the 2023 school year, we used a few minutes for practices aimed at our project. The students produced questions in English at home, researched about Poland, brought a lot of interest in "their backpacks". Therefore, I took advantage of this excitement and we did oral practices so that they could verbally develop their research, so that at the time of practice they could externalize.

Our first contact was of an interactional nature, about free time activities, so that the children could get to know each other and do comparative cultural studies mediated by us, teachers, in which they could perceive the differences between the management of free time in a culture different from theirs. To this end, we previously built oral interactions in English in the classroom, so that on the day of the first interaction, students had enough repertoire for participation and development of fluency practice.

Then, we had other interactions through the exchange of materials, mediated by us teachers. As our approach has always sought sociocultural interaction, all other activities developed were always intended to know and explore the culture of the other. We did some explorative work on the students' daily lives, school activities, typical foods of the countries, music, among others.

From this perspective, experiences like this are extremely relevant because they praise values for personal growth. In this way, by understanding that there is a culture different from ours, different attitudes and activities, it is possible to provoke self-knowledge and respect the different manifestations that shape the identity of a people. Thus, for the children, they learned to respect and understood that there are other ways of seeing the world, discovering that there is an incredible variety of different cultures to be explored and understood.

GETTING TO KNOW THE SCHOOLS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT - COLEGIO AÇÃO, SANTALUZ, BAHIA

Located at Rua José Alves de Goes, Nº 265, Centro - Santaluz, in the micro-region of Serrinha, in the state of Bahia, Northeast Brazil. The basic education institution, Colégio Ação – Santaluz, is committed to offering quality education with the aim of contributing to the integral education of its students. The unit is based on ethical principles and responsibility and the pedagogical actions are promoted by experienced teachers who are constantly updating their professions. It collaborates for the full development of students' cognitive and intellectual aspects, ensuring the increase in society of citizens capable of understanding their role.

The purpose of the school is to provide a motivating environment, so that the potential of each individual is expressed, acquiring knowledge and new experiences according to the daily life in the classrooms. Challenging local socioeconomic and climatic adversities.

In order to improve the student's education, the Colégio Ação – Santaluz educational establishment offers extracurricular activities to awaken the talent of students, improving performance. The work of cognitive stimulation in different areas presents a significant gain in the integral development of the individual. Students practice body expressions more frequently, and become more critical, participative, providing autonomy, tolerance, respect and recognition of other people's point of view.

In the English language, we structure our methodologies in order to provide a rich and engaging experience, always based on communication and oral practices, as we believe that linguistic immersion is of fundamental importance for the effective learning of any new language. In our daily lives, we work with dynamic proposals and methods that encourage and expose students to the English language in a natural and spontaneous way.

We develop immersive projects during the school year, we produce immersion moments with specific themes during classes, oral presentations, debates and discussions in which students can express their opinions and argue in the target language. In summary, it is observed that instigating communication is the key to success in the English language. Our goal is to make our students feel comfortable and confident when using the English language on a daily basis, effective communication in formal and informal contexts, through these constant practices, language proficiency is rooted.

N26 PRIMARY SCHOOL – *ANDRZEJ STRUGA* – KRAKOW, POLAND

On July 20, 1963, *Andrzej Strug* Primary School No. 26 in Krakow at No. 34 *Krasickiego* Street was officially opened. School No. 26 was the 599th "millennium" built to celebrate the Polish State Millennium. The institution is basic education grades I-VIII, including six sports departments with a gymnastics profile, sports classes are in cooperation with *Korona Sports Club* and *Podgórze Student Sports Club*.

In the educational work of the school, activities are developed that prepared students for social life, educational discipline, the cult of physical work and patriotic education are emphasized as important. The main jobs are those that promote the acquisition of knowledge and respect for creative work, the development of children's interests and a sense of responsibility for themselves and others. The school's work plan includes a rich calendar of academies and assemblies related to the school's educational activities. Great importance is attached to the careful preparation of school events, which gave students the opportunity to present their talents and skills.

Regarding the English language, the school encourages cultural plurality through projects such as *ERASMUS*+³, aiming at cultural promotion. In addition to having stood out on the country's global scene with above-average scores in external tests. The school's

³ ERASMUS+ is a European Union program to support education, training and projects related to youth and sport in Europe. It offers opportunities for mobility and cooperation in the following areas: higher education; vocational education and training; school education; adult education; youth and sport.

eighth-graders scored very high on the exams, which are among the best in Krakow and on a national scale. It was: 86% in English (in Krakow – 80%, in Poland – 66%), 86% in Polish (in Krakow – 73%, in Poland – 66%), 75% in mathematics (in Krakow – 60%, in Poland – 53%).

CULTURAL EXPERIENCES AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN EASTERN EUROPE REACHING THE BANKS OF THE VISTULA RIVER, KRAKOW, POLAND

Situated on the banks of the Vistula River in southern Poland, currently Poland's second largest city, Krakow is enchanting and fascinating, known as the country's cultural cradle. Easily the most touristic and beautiful city in Eastern Europe. Krakow was the capital of the Kingdom of Poland between the years 1038 and 1596, even though it lost the position of capital to Warsaw, it is still the most visited city in the country, for its heritage beauty and historical richness.

Initially I left Brazil for Paris, France, at the end of 2023, I spent a few days there, getting to know and getting culturally involved with Parisian life. Some time later, I took a train from Paris to Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, to get to know a little more about the lands of windmills and the incredible painter Van Gogh. Days later, I went to Belgium, visited some cities in the country such as *Brussels*, *Bruges* and *Ghent*. Later, I took a bus to the city of *Charleroi*, still in Belgium, to fly towards Eastern Europe. Arriving in Krakow I was welcomed by teacher *Annescka*, from the N26 Primary School, still at the city's airport, heading to the center where I stayed.

Starting the cultural tours in Krakow, we visit the Wawel hills, where Wawel Castle is located, the banks of the Vistula River, a place of great importance for Poland, an enclosure that refers to the period of the Polish monarchy, full of legends that make up the local stories. On the same day, we also visited the cave to learn a little about the legend of the *Wawel dragon*. At the end of the day, we took a walk through the Jewish quarter (*Kazimierz*), a place that refers to the sad stories of the Nazi invasion of Poland, in which Jews were removed from their homes and placed in ghettos (spaces of segregation) on the other side of the Vistula River, under a strong surveillance system. I returned to the accommodation delighted and shocked by the experiences of the historical-cultural context.

Still in the context of World War II, I took a guided tour of Oskar Schindler's Factory, a nail polish factory initially and, according to the need of the conflict, began to manufacture ammunition during the War period, remaining effective for the rescue of 1200

Jews during the Nazi invasion. The factory today functions as a museum that tells the story of Krakow during the invasion of the Nazi regime.

The main elements of Nazi ideology were: hatred of Jews, democracy, communism and also the conviction of the superiority of the German race over other races. Planning the creation of a "racially pure" society, the Nazis planned the extermination of the Jews as well as the Slavs, Gypsies, and others. (In-text citation: ("AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU H I S T Ó R I A E PRESENT", [s.d.]

It was an incredible tour, full of historical details, to get to know *Auschwitz* becoming a symbol of the Holocaust, the result of all the contextualization of the hatred of a specific group in Europe. I stayed there until nightfall, returning to the lodge to rest and prepare to travel to *Oświęcim*⁴, the region where the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp is located.

Early in the morning, I start to prepare, get clothes for lower temperatures, strong winds and snow, in the Polish winter period the countryside region, because it is more open, usually has lower temperatures. I went to the old town to wait for the bus that would take me to the *Oświęcim region*, about an hour and a half trip. During the journey, I was able to reflect a lot on what awaited me when I arrived in a place where more than a million people were exterminated, showing how cruel human beings can be and how much history needs to be lived and felt, so that it does not repeat itself.

Arriving in *Oświęcim*, our group was directed to the entrance of the museum for accreditation, meeting with the guide and organizing audiovisual material. All ready, we followed an open-air corridor, surrounded by new concrete walls. We walked for a few minutes, during this period, we were being contextualized by the guide about the history of the field.

The German Nazi concentration camp of *Auschwitz* became a symbol of the Holocaust, genocide and terror to the world. It was created by the Germans, in the middle of 1940, on the outskirts of *Oświęcim*, a Polish city that was annexed to the Third Reich by the Nazis. The city was given the German name "Auschwitz", which was also used to determine the name of the camp: Konzentrationsla ger Auschwitz. (In-text citation: ("AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU H I S T Ó R I A E PRESENT", [s.d.]

Then, we soon came across posters telling the story and contextualizing the concentration camp. We arrive at the famous plaque with the inscription *Arbeit macht frei*

⁴ With just over 10,000 inhabitants, the Polish town of *Oświęcim* wasn't especially important, actually. In 1939 the Wehrmacht – the armed forces of Nazi Germany – occupied, annexed and renamed it. Two years later, the regime installed the largest Nazi death camp of all, Auschwitz-Birkenau, in the region.

(work liberates or makes us free). So we continued our visit, getting to know the operational functioning of the camp and its inhumane conditions experienced by the prisoners. We visited the intact facilities, we had contact with the belongings of the people who lived there, including the original barracks where they spent the nights, as well as the disastrous gas chamber and crematoriums.

It was a remarkable experience, because experiencing *Auschwitz* was not a simple historical reliving of a symbol of the Holocaust, it was realizing the extent of hatred, understanding the dehumanization of people to the detriment of a certain ideology of racial supremacy, in which a group of people was drastically exterminated.

To better understand this point of supremacy, it is important to analyze a little issues related to totalitarian regimes and their predominance. Individuals who have passed through concentration camps throughout history have had their identity lost long before their lives. "The true horror of concentration and extermination camps lies in the fact that the inmates, even if they manage to stay alive, are more isolated from the world of the living than if they had died, because horror compels oblivion" (Arendt, 1989, p. 493).

According to Hannah Arendt (1989, p. 496), concentration camps can be defined as follows, analyzing three characteristics:

Limbo corresponds to those relatively benign forms, which were once popular even in non-totalitarian countries, aimed at removing from society all kinds of undesirable elements – refugees, stateless persons, outcasts and the unemployed; The camps for displaced persons, for example, which continued to exist even after the war, are nothing more than camps for those who have become superfluous and annoying. Purgatory is represented by the labor camps of the Soviet Union, where abandonment is allied to forced and disorderly labor. Hell, in the most liberal sense, is represented by that type of camp that the Nazis perfected and where all life was organized, completely and systematically, in order to cause the greatest possible torment (Hannah Arendt, 1989, p. 496).

In the Nazi regime, terrorizing was part of the system, creating a feeling of fear and terror in the individual, in addition to distancing him from social life, from everyone around him, ending any possibility of socio-interactional plurality. Oliveira (2012, p. 169), in the same vein as Arendt, comments on the following:

Totalitarian terror makes everyone become One-Man, that is, the onslaught of this instrument of government is in the sense of transforming everyone into a single humanity. It is in view of this that terror constitutes itself as an element of support for the totalitarian regime that destroys the space of plurality among men.

After hours of cultural contact and experiences, I return to Krakow with a personal feeling of fulfillment, of satisfaction for what I lived, but also of sadness for feeling in my skin, minimally speaking, what thousands of people lived, felt and witnessed during the entire period of World War II. I said goodbye to my group of tourists, went to the accommodation, rested and prepared to, the next day, get to know the Polish school of the project in loco, a moment so awaited by me.

PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES AND CULTURAL IMMERSION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL N26 - *ANDRZEJ STRUGA*

I woke up very early, very excited to get to know the N26 Primary School, due to what was experienced in the immersion project started in Brazil *online*. I took a cable car to the station closest to the school, upon arrival the teacher in charge of the English language classes, was already waiting for me for the visitor accreditation at the entrance. The school is very organized, both in its physical structure and in the organization of the pedagogical work. I did the accreditation and soon they called me to present the entire structure of the unit. It has well-structured classrooms and a rotation system, where students do not have fixed classrooms, they move around the school according to the subjects of the day and their specific classrooms. In sports, they offer sports gymnastics classes, with six departments of this profile. Swimming and soccer lessons are also offered.

Thus, I was directed to the English language classroom for acclimatization and organization, for the beginning of the class. At the exact time, the students began to arrive and sit in their seats, many different looks at the visitor who was there. The regent teacher starts the class and introduces me to the class, now in person, as they had already had other connections previously, still in Brazil *online*. Soon after, I start my class by introducing myself and bringing the proposal of my visit to the school.

So, I started my class with my presentation to analyze what level of language proficiency the students were at. I could see that many could understand practically everything I said, others received help from more proficient colleagues, but always interested in understanding and participating in the interactions. At all times, I used methodologies with an emphasis on oral cultural interaction practices, as I share the idea that language learning takes place through communication, exchange of experiences and relationships built by social interaction.

We have many ways to facilitate the learning of our students, so we just need to transform our methodologies, adapt them to a vector model of fast and effective learning. Martins (1997) discusses issues of interaction, according to him, from the processes of interpersonal connections knowledge is built. In this way, in the school context, these interactions will provide oral practice, narrowing the path of the student's social reality and the language under study. David (2006, p.28) adds that:

To this end, the ideal for teaching would be the organization of the environment that is the basis for the learner to feel stimulated to learn. English, as a rich language that transits in several worlds, requires the teacher to work as a mediator, through which he can lead the student to the world of discovery, motivation, wanting to understand and seek, where he can be the key piece of his development.

According to Vygotsky (2000), language learning occurs through the use of language in situations of significant interactions with other people and, therefore, the subject is constituted in and through language. Therefore, human behavior must be understood from the social relations that individuals establish with the social environment in which they live. This learning approach is totally linked to the techniques used in the *Storytelling methodology*.

In this sense, I continued with the class, we dealt with Brazilian cultural aspects in comparison with Poles, we discussed geographical positioning, we talked about specific regions of the country, food, sports, nature and leisure, always in comparative studies, bringing factors of Polish culture in comparison with Brazilian, strengthening an exchange of particular aspects of the two countries, fostering the specificity of the method used.

In this perspective of the exchange of cultural aspects through, Libânio (2001) makes an important quote regarding interaction:

Education is linked to processes of communication and interaction through which the members of a society assimilate knowledge, skills, techniques, attitudes, values existing in the culturally organized environment and, with this, gain the necessary level to produce other knowledge, techniques, values, etc. (LIBÂNEO, 2001. p. 7).

After all the oral practice and cultural exchange part, we did a dynamic activity of movement and fixation of vocabularies used in the initial conversation. Words that were worked on during the class were added to the whiteboard. The students were divided into pairs for a competition, whoever heard the word and ran to the board to erase it as soon as possible would win. Whoever lost would do a dance from a *famous game* among

teenagers, increasing the motivational level to have more focus. The activity was carried out successfully and we had a lot of enjoyment.

According to Brown (1994), "motivation must come from the student, but for him to feel motivated to learn a second language, the teacher must create the perfect environment" (p. 160), that is, the teacher must be willing to teach looking for more fun ways for the student to learn and see the learning of the language "other eyes", thus, becoming a motivated and motivating student.

On the second day of visits, I had contacts with other classes and participated in three more classes. All based on the same principles of oral interaction, with the creation of bonds as a bridge of transition for the acquisition of knowledge. I met a gymnastics class, young artistic gymnastics competitors who represent the school. And what caught my attention the most was their posture and discipline in classroom contexts, proving the importance of sport in integral education.

For us educators, the importance of including sports practice in the daily lives of young people and adolescents in schools is due to the fact that sports have a good contribution to the socialization of practitioners. Sport has rules and hierarchies, and can help in the organization of society, reinforcing the concept of collective sense and respect. As the sport has been appreciated by a large part of society, it "becomes appropriate, incorporated as knowledge to be transmitted." (MORENO and MACHADO, 2006, p.133).

Continuing with the program, we had an event in a food sharing room, and music presentations related to Christmas. The students brought food from their homes, typical foods produced by them and their families and shared it with each other during the collective snack, sang Polish songs and Christmas classics in English. Right after the break, I had another class with an eighth-grade class, we did a vocabulary acquisition activity, the objective was to contextualize three languages, English, Portuguese and Polish. We used English to mediate and I was responsible for Portuguese, Polish children for Polish. We would launch a word in English and have to automatically translate it into both languages, then they would try to speak Portuguese and I would speak Polish. It was a lot of fun and we acquired several vocabularies.

On the last day of the visit, I had the opportunity to participate in a Christmas event in the school's auditorium. Poland is a predominantly Catholic country and has a long tradition of celebrating Christmas. They rehearse during the month of December to perform recitals, where they present theater about the birth of Jesus and sing songs, songs are a

very important part of the Christmas celebration in the country. For cultural enrichment, the preparation of Christmas in Poland begins two days before, families prepare twelve typical dishes, among them Beetroot Soup (*Borscht*), homemade savory pastry (*Pierogi*) and cheese cake (*Sernik*).

Thus, my visit to the N26-Andrzej Strug Primary School ended, where I was able to put my pedagogical practices into action, prove communicative focus methodologies as something innovative and facilitating for the teaching/learning of a new language, also understand in loco how strong the language immersion process can be when we are involved with cultural issues and being exposed to a certain language, The process of language acquisition is maximized and has an inexplicable tendency to fixation.

PORTRAITS OF WAR – A GAZE THAT EMBRACES AND CARESSES

"In war, the first victim is the truth."

The Russo-Ukrainian War has lasted for more than ten years, since 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea, intensifying the conflict in the east of the country, through pro-Russian separatist groups declaring independence of regions. In February 2022, the war intensifies when Russia launches a large-scale offensive in Ukraine, escalating the conflict in an armed way, resulting in a large number of deaths, humanitarian crises with exodus from the country, and geopolitical tensions have taken hold in Europe.

From February to October 2022, according to official United Nations figures, 6,306 civilians were killed and 9,602 were injured across Ukraine (UN, 17.10.2022). The Ministry of Defense of Ukraine claims that the number of Ukrainian servicemen killed was around 9 thousand as of September (UKRINFORM, 09.2022) while the Russian authorities claim that this number would have exceeded 60 thousand (BBC, 21.09.2022). The former mayor of Mariupol emphasizes that during the siege of the city at least 10 thousand civilians were killed (Karmanau *et al.*, 2022).

In the current year, with the war still ongoing, many refugees have not yet had the opportunity to return to their homes and resume their lives, they are still scattered across Europe and other continents. Before the war, the Ukrainian population was about 44 million inhabitants, a year after the start of the war, about 07 million people were forced to live far from their homes. Some European countries have offered support to Ukraine to receive refugees, such as Poland, which has received about one and a half million Ukrainians.

But why do I bring reflections on war, conflict and refugees in my report of teaching practice? My answer will be given through a physical description: blond hair, short, a little dark, dull, somewhat dull, rounded face shape, with a haircut that on the forehead resembled a heart, well-drawn and thin eyebrows, bright green eyes, those that hug you without touching, however, a sad countenance hovered over them, a slightly closed mouth, full of doubts, fears and desires. This is the description of an 11-year-old boy named Matvii (fictitious name), sitting at the back of the classroom, looking suspiciously at the stranger (me) who visits him.

With a suspicious and curious look, sometimes making eye contact, seeking interaction, but soon erased by his extreme shyness. I thought it was funny and soon smiled when I was stared at, questioned by a look that said more than I could understand. I was in the part of my presentation, 'Brazilian, English language teacher, Jiu-Jitsu practitioner, a lover of immersion and cultural exploration, when I look at Matvii, I notice a different smile, something attracted his attention.

I addressed the students, one by one, asking them to introduce themselves and be free to talk about what they liked to do and, if they wanted, they could ask me something too. The presentations took place, personal questions were directed and soon after, it was Matvii's turn, with his very basic English, pronunciation affected in an extreme way by his native language, Ukrainian. He asked some questions, I confess that I had to contextualize from loose words. I came to the conclusion: it was that Neymar, acclaimed by everyone at that school. Matvii was passionate about football, he knew many Brazilian players. From then on, he did not stop with questions, his shyness, for now, disappeared.

Suddenly, the classroom teacher calls my attention to the break time, we release the students to the courtyard and stay in the classroom talking. Soon I questioned her about Matvii, I talked about my perceptions and her interest, her desire to express herself even with so many difficulties of language proficiency in the English language. Faced with my description of him, she tells me his whole story... Matvii is a Ukrainian boy, from the eastern region, the most affected by the war, he lost his parents and other family members in the conflict, he was forced to flee his city to take refuge in Poland, leaving everything behind, with no prospect of ever returning. At the time he was living with a Polish family who decided to shelter him in their home until he could return to his city, still without a scheduled date, without any hope, in the face of a critically shaken geopolitics.

The next day we had an event that preceded the day of celebrating Christmas at school, on this specific day, we organized a collective snack, the students brought food from their homes, the parents involved prepared cakes, pies and typical Polish dishes for their children to share at school with their classmates. When I arrived in the room, everyone was already setting the tables, organizing the food and playing. The teacher explained some things to them in Polish, gave some commands and we started listening to music to set them up until snack time.

I continued with my observations, sitting at the back of the room next to Matvii, on this day I was not class leader, so I observed a lot the moment of sharing, of fun with typical and Christmas songs. When we arrived at the time of the break, I was invited to the center to be part of the collective snack. Matvii took the initiative, went to me and gestured for me to accompany him, invited me to sit at the table with him and shared his snack with me.

However, due to his difficulties in communicating in the English language, I encouraged him to use the English language, I used body language to better help him understand the language we were using at the time, but at the same time I decided to deepen the conversation using English to Ukrainian translation tools, it worked very well, a smile jumped on his face, His eyes lit up, and soon after he took the cell phone from my hand and started typing everything he wanted to say, we stayed in this cultural exchange for a few minutes.

During the conversation, we talked about food, tastes and preferences, school, English language, among other topics, but when he arrived in football, his passion for the sport and famous Brazilian players was clear. Although, with a great desire to know a little more about his past before the refuge in Poland, I was somewhat disconcerted to scrutinize more and a little afraid of the fact that he had lost his parents in the conflict.

We shared food, a chocolate cake, boxed juice, homemade cookies and tangerines, typical at the time of year we were. Then, I took a tour of the other tables tasting other typical Polish foods. After this moment, the students began to sing Christmas carols in Polish while finishing their snack. We have reached the end of the penultimate day before the party that would celebrate Christmas at school.

And finally, on Christmas Day, we arrived a little earlier to organize some materials for the presentations in the school auditorium. Minutes later the students began to arrive, all dressed up, very formal, dress shirts, some with ties and shoes. They brought gifts for

the teacher, some letters and tangerine boxes, yes, tangerine boxes, very common from what I could observe.

I announced that this was my last moment with the students at the school before taking the flight back to Brussels – Belgium, I made my final remarks about the project, about the experiences I had in Krakow, about the school visited, and about them, students who greatly brightened my international teaching experience. We took pictures to record that moment, a milestone in my life. When we were leaving the classroom towards the auditorium, Matvii held my arm and gave me a goodbye hug, looked in his bag for something, after a few seconds, he took out a tangerine and smiling, extended his hand reaching for me.

Symbolically, the tangerine fruit is related to prosperity, abundance, good luck and spiritual renewal. So Matvii, may your future be prosperous and abundant, may luck be with you and lead you on the best paths. May you go through the spiritual renewal you want so much, may you be strong, firm and warrior, I know what you have been through and I also know how much I wish and hope for better days in your life. Thank you for being a key part of this incredible experience. Rest assured that lifelong lessons were learned from an 11-year-old boy.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The development of this work of linguistic and cultural exchange was of great value, as it showed how much *online* tools had an innovative potential for the teaching of the English language, working as a bridge to connect countries so geographically distant, interconnecting schools and enabling the sharing of experiences through oral interactions, allowing the knowledge of the other to understand oneself.

The methodological proposal adopted by the project aimed at linguistic immersion as an oral practice bias for the interconnection between Brazil and Poland. A methodology that, through online dialogues, provided us with the motivational development of students to get to know the culture of others and aroused interest in showing their own culture to the world. Understand that there are other ways of seeing the world, understand the different perspectives and ways of life, praising tolerance with the other and promoting understanding.

To conclude, an international internship experience does not provide a simple experience of language use and didactic teaching techniques, it brings a baggage that

goes beyond the institutional, which breaks the pages of textbooks, which crosses the grammatical rules and listening and oral practice activities, which speak louder than reading a text and understanding it, that draw more smiles than movement dynamics. So, teacher, if you have the opportunity, embrace, live and build memories, create bonds and root experiences.

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