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**1403 and the English classes: exploratory work for
understanding**

DEPARTAMENTO DE LETRAS
Curso de Especialização em Língua Inglesa

Rio de Janeiro
Maio de 2014



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*Nothing in life is to be feared,
it is only to be understood
Now is the time to understand more,
so that we may fear less.*

Marie Curie (Chiu, Gilmer, Treagust . 2011, p.9)

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It has been a long way to reach this point. All I feel right now is a sense of accomplishment and gratitude for all the people who encouraged me to follow my dreams. Or even to people who said I could never make it, I feel extremely grateful!

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Abstract

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Much has been said about the teaching of English in public schools. English teachers have to deal with their students' indiscipline and resistance towards the study of this foreign language. In this study, we analyse a group of fourth graders from a school in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, their hatred towards the English teacher and their lack of interest in the English language. Exploratory conversations with other teachers from the same school and a PEPA (Potentially Exploitable Pedagogical Activity) were conducted in order to understand this situation. Findings suggest that students' behaviour is due to many social factors and need to be deeply understood.

Keywords: Exploratory Practice, public schools, beliefs

Contents

1. Introduction.....	8
2. What can help us while working for understanding?	10
2.1 Exploratory Practice.....	10
3. Surprise: your 1403 students are not who you think they are!.....	14
4. Let's understand!.....	18
5. Concluding Understandings	25
6. Bibliographical References.....	27
Appendix	29

1. Introduction

The city of Rio de Janeiro is going to be a scenario for two major sports events – the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016. Because of that it has been mandatory that all children in the public schools from the municipality have English classes at least once a week. Since 2010, the municipality has been hiring new English teachers to work on a new project called “Rio Criança Global” and this project establishes English classes for all grades from Ensino Fundamental.

I was one of these teachers hired in December 2010. I used to teach twelve groups, sometimes sixteen groups, due to the fact the school where I work is small and at times there are no more English teachers, except me. In 2013, there was a specific group that called my attention – the fourth graders from 1403. They used to say that they hated me and that they hated English too. It was not the first group that does not love English but it was the strongest resistance that I had ever seen and the first group that even expressed their hatred for me making me feel really uncomfortable with that. That is why I started asking myself what I was doing wrong and thinking I was unqualified to be there. My mind started contemplating some puzzles, then, it became necessary to do something beyond thinking.

According to Dick Allwright (2003, p.114), working for understanding life in the classroom will provide a good foundation for helping teachers and learners make their time together pleasant and productive. Unfortunately, the time we teachers spend in the classrooms, puzzled with the lack of interest in English, is something not pleasant for the students or teachers and not productive either. Besides, as I knew part of them hated me, it used to make the time I spent with them really uncomfortable. According to Michael Joseph (ALLWRIGHT, 2001), teaching must be good for the teachers, because if it is not it will not be good for the learners.

I started my process of understanding, motivated by the 1403 group, during my third year of teaching in a public school. At the very beginning, I also had problems with other groups concerning content and discipline and I used to think that experience would make me feel better when facing difficult situations with my students. I started feeling more confident but I realized it was not just about confidence: I needed to develop myself as a teacher and understanding was essential to do a good job. EP

helped me understand that the world is composed of continuously interesting ‘puzzles’ - things it is worth continuously puzzling over (ALLWRIGHT, 2001).

While working with this group and the EP principles and ideas, a lot of questions sprang to my mind. Why are some students not interested in learning English? What do the students think about English? Is it fun? Do they like the material – the book, the topics, the songs? Do they see any connections with their reality? Do they really hate English? Do they really hate me? All of this claims for understanding – Why does this happen? How can we improve the quality of life in our classes? Deep understanding may be a precursor to meaningful changes.

This paper is organized in the following sections: section 2: **What can help us while working for understanding?**, which explains what Exploratory Practice is; section 3: **Surprise: your 1403 students are not who you think they are**, which contains the description of participants and the scenario and finally section 4 (**Let’s understand!**) and section 5 (**Concluding Understandings**) show the reader my understandings.

2. What can help us while working for understanding?

2.1 Exploratory Practice

Traditionally, teachers have always been the focus in the educational system. According to this system, for good learning to happen, good materials and a good teacher are enough. Besides, students do not have a voice in the classroom. Fortunately this view has been changing and we can see “learners at centre-stage”, as “key developing practitioners” (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.1). According to Allwright & Hanks this change in perspective is important because students are the ones who can do their own learning.

Exploratory Practice (EP) is one way of promoting the development of these practitioners. Traditional educational systems see teachers as professionals to be trained not as practitioners of pedagogy/education. The word practitioners in EP is ‘fully inclusive’ (DAR; SALVI; REBOLLEDO, 2013, p.2): it means that it treats both teachers and learners as practitioners in the process of teaching and learning. If it were not for the learners, the educational system would not exist, however it is not common to see learners, always as practitioners of learning in traditional educational systems, or teachers being treated at the same level.

Exploratory Practice is an approach for inclusive practitioner research guided by seven principles. They emerged from the need of avoiding the ethical and epistemological problems identified with the existing research models. These principles are: 1 – putting quality of life first, 2 – working for understanding, 3 – involving everybody in the work for understanding, 4 – bringing people together, 5 – conducting work in a spirit of mutual development, 6 – working for understanding is a continuous enterprise and 7 – integrating the work for understanding fully into existing curricular practices in order to minimize the burden and maximize sustainability (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.149-155).

The first two principles establish the central concerns for inclusive practitioner research in the area. Exploratory Practice seeks quality of life not only in the classroom, but also outside the classroom. According to Allwright & Hanks, our personal and our professional lives are interwoven. There is integration between classroom life and classroom work although we can observe that sometimes classroom work is more

valued than classroom life. We have to consider ‘work to be a part of life, or an attitude to it, not an alternative’ (ALLWRIGHT, 2003, p.120).

Understanding is essential to intelligent decision-making (ALLWRIGHT, 2009, p.150-151). EP is not against change, but it is against *unintelligent* change, and against *bureaucratic* pressure for change without understanding what is going on (ALLWRIGHT, 2003, p.151).

Principles number three, four and five are related to the notion of agency and collegiality (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.151). People need to work for understanding collaboratively and everyone must work together in a collegial spirit of mutual development, teachers/researchers and learners as researchers.

Principle number six considers that life is dynamic and understandings will always be provisional and valid shortly, so working for understanding should be continuous (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.153-154). Understanding leads to a citizenship spirit, in a mutually respectful environment where people can recognize each other’s development space. It makes us think that working continuously for understanding is something really laborious and we already have a lot of work to do. So, we observe the next EP principle which claims for sustainability.

Principle number seven deals with integrating the work in the curricular practices. According to Allwright & Hanks (p.154), this integration preserves the language curriculum and learning time but it does not maximize the preparation time, providing sustainability. By integrating research in pedagogical activities no extra preparation is needed and no language learning time is wasted. Teachers can even integrate the language content in the investigation process.

EP brings to the pedagogical field five propositions about learners. As a matter of fact, these propositions are “how we would like learners to be treated by us language professionals” (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p. 4). EP, as much other humanistic thinking, sees learners as social beings that have feelings, emotions and the capability of making choices.

The first proposition is that **learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own idiosyncratic ways**. It claims that each lesson is a different lesson for every learner even though a classroom may have many similarities (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.5). Each lesson is a different experience for each student due to the fact that we do not notice everything equally, at the same time. Our

learning depends on the way we notice things that happen in the classroom, based on our own experiences.

The second proposition, **learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment**, considers that despite the fact that each learner is unique, interaction is essential in the process of classroom learning. Taking into consideration the mutual support a group can provide, learn collectively is much more enjoyable and much more productive than learning alone (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p. 5).

Proposition number three sets that **learners are capable of taking learning seriously**. According to Allwright (p.6), learners being serious or not about their own learning “is a matter of great social importance in the classroom”. It is really important to treat learners as being capable of doing that, even if their behaviour shows the contrary. Teachers tend to think that learners are totally irresponsible based on the indiscipline they show. However giving them more responsibility for their own learning behavior can diminish the discipline problems (ALLWRIGHT. 2003).

The fourth proposition, **learners are capable of independent decision-making**, is extremely connected with the third proposition. Language curricula, syllabuses, textbooks and lesson plans do not consider learners’ decisions about what to learn, when to learn it and how to learn it (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.6).

The fifth and last proposition is that **learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning** (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.6). Learners and teachers are classroom practitioners developing their own understandings of language classroom life (ALLWRIGHT, 2005, p.353). Traditional methods tend to emphasize control of teaching in order to achieve control of learning. Learners are perfectly capable of controlling their own learning, so, according to EP, teachers should be able to allow students to make decisions about how they learn best.

These propositions are not new in the educational area, but they are not put into practice due to “the often overwhelming pressure to conform to national institutional demands for standardization” (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.7). Teachers want to use their ‘sense of plausibility’, as Prabhu (1987) mentions, but are constrained by institutional pressure. Sometimes teachers have no real choice and have to follow the conveyors of method, even if they go against their sense of plausibility (textbooks, for example). And even if they are given a choice, there would be something prescribed in

their teaching. It is argued by Allwright that “this pressure for standardization de-professionalises teachers” (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.8). Teaching is permeated by external demands and the teachers are mere executors of outsiders’ decisions, not being directly involved in the curriculum development.

The seven principles and also the five propositions about learners are essential when you decide to work with EP. Working together with learners and peers can promote interesting findings and a new way of perceiving the teaching/learning process.

3. Surprise: your 1403 students are not who you think they are!

In this section, I consider essential to state some beliefs I used to have regarding teaching in public schools and teaching the 1403 group. According to Dewey (2008, p.116), thoughts or beliefs cover “all the matters of which we have no sure knowledge and yet we are sufficiently confident of to act upon and also the matters that we now accept as certainly true, as knowledge, but which nevertheless may be questioned in the future (...)”. Every pre-service teacher has a set of beliefs, based on their experience as learners or (and) based on the theory they had been learning throughout their academic life and practicum.

When I started teaching in Rio de Janeiro’s municipality I had just finished my undergraduate course. Now, reflecting on my practice at that beginning, I notice I had some assumptions really clear in mind: I used to think that if I were a good teacher, I would teach and the students would like my classes and consequently learn English. In addition to that, I believed that if a teacher had good materials and plenty of resources, students would be motivated. To some extent, I was right: I had some excellent groups, really motivated, who used to love the English classes and where learning used to happen. However, I also had some groups that could not learn anything I was teaching, and I thought this was due to their lack of attention and discipline.

The school where I work is part of the project “Escolas do Amanhã” (Schools of Tomorrow) and is situated in Serrinha, a poor community, in Madureira, Rio de Janeiro. According to the Secretary of Education, Cláudia Costin, learning difficulty depends on external factors linked to the school, such as violence. “Escolas do Amanhã” are seen as educational spaces, made for students’ safety and where they can receive all structural support from the government, concerning materials, staff and teachers’ training.

Even though I was constantly being recycled in the training offered by the municipality, it was not enough. I decided to continue studying at the university while I was still in my first year of experience. I was familiar with Exploratory Practice and since the first semester I had in mind to develop an exploratory activity with my students from the municipality. Simultaneously, I had been acquiring experience in teaching, which I considered would improve my relationship with the difficult groups. Actually, it did improve, but not in the way I would like it to happen. I learnt how to be firmer with my students, but discipline did not help them learning. That goes totally

against one of society's belief. According to an article published in one of the biggest weekly magazines in Brazil, after the 2013 Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio (ENEM) results, "there is a widespread inability of teachers to prevent the mess in the classroom, especially in public schools" (CASTRO. 2014, p.20, my translation)¹.

I used to feel really frustrated when I could not control the class and the 1403 group made me feel like I was having my first problematic one. It was not the largest group at the school. It had around twenty students aging from 10 to 14 years old. There were students who had failed the fourth grade at least once and although almost all the learners were children, they used to intimidate their peers from other groups because they were really big and violent.

In order to understand the behavior of 1403 students towards me and their lack of interest in the English classes, I proposed a PEPA (Potentially Exploitable Pedagogical Activity) to the learners. A PEPA (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.157) is a pedagogic activity that EP professionals normally use in the classroom which helps any exploratory teacher understand their puzzle due to its potential to be exploited. The understanding process occurs within the everyday practice and most activities have the potential for both learning the language and improving understanding.

This PEPA consisted of investigating their likes and dislikes not only concerning life in the classroom, but also concerning life outside it. This activity was not part of the syllabus, but they had seen this topic in the end of the previous year – so I decided to revise the vocabulary. It was divided in three steps: firstly, I wrote on the board "I LIKE..." and students had to tell the class what their favourite things were: going to school, riding my bike, playing soccer, playing videogames, playing hide and seek, surfing on the internet and playing with animals (see appendix, picture 1).

After that, I asked them to write it on a piece of paper or to draw. The same thing was done with their dislikes. They mentioned: school, studying, violence, "bate bate" (a popular toy among them which produces an irritating noise), my group teacher, indiscipline and animal cruelty (see appendix, picture 2).

With reference to life in the classroom, the following responses were given:

¹ Há uma incapacidade generalizada dos professores em impedir a bagunça nas aulas, sobretudo nas escolas públicas. CASTRO, C. Bagunça Tóxica. *Veja Magazine*, São Paulo: Abril Group, ed. 2355, year 47, n.2, January 8th, 2014. Page 20.

LIKES	DISLIKES
When the teacher plays games.	When there are fights in the classroom.
The English book, the activities and when we have to draw things.	When the boys make a mess in the classroom.
The school.	When the teacher calls our attention.
The teacher.	When the teacher shouts at us.
	When the teacher uses the microphone.

Their answers to this activity were really surprising: I had totally different assumptions about the possible answers. First of all, I used to think that the 1403 group did not like the book. I always thought they considered it extremely difficult, not only because the other teachers commented about it in the training sessions, but also because some students used to refuse opening it during my class and just throw it on the classroom floor. After the PEPA, I realized that they thought the characters on the book were really interesting and fun. I also thought they did not like me, as one of them had already told me and other teachers as well. I had felt really bad about it.

The things they do not like were totally the opposite of my ideas. I thought that they were used to all the fighting, the mess and that they were ok with my microphone. Every time I entered the classroom, I observed papers, books (not only English books) and things on the floor. Besides, there was always someone fighting verbally or physically every single day I was there, especially boys and a particular girl who was really violent. They had never mentioned that they did not like the noisy environment I was also contributing to create.

I wanted to find out more about their thoughts, so we talked about their answers. I asked the pupils to draw them on a piece of paper. Some students did not want to draw so I helped them to write it in Portuguese, because they have a lot of difficulties in expressing their ideas even in their native language. When we finished drawing and writing, we decided to make a poster with the likes and dislikes (see appendix, picture 3) and we put it on the classroom wall. We were involved in this PEPA for four classes.

Besides this activity, I conducted another PEPA with some teachers – an exploratory conversation. It was a normal conversation that I usually have with my fellow teachers at the school, but this time I decided to observe their opinions with an exploratory look. The teachers who participated in the exploratory conversations were the teacher of 1403 group, the Reading teacher and the Physical Education (PE) teacher.

The conversations were guided by six central questions:

QUESTIONS
1 - How long have you worked in this school?
2 - How long have you known the students of 1403?
3 - What do you think of the performance of 1403 in your classes? Why? Why do you think so? Why do they have this performance? Why do they behave like this?
4 - How do you feel when you enter room 1403? And during the class? What makes you feel that way?
5 - Do you see any relationship between what happens in the community and what happens during the class?
6 - What do you think can be done to improve the relationship between students and teachers / staff/ direction at the school?

Questions 1 and 2 were aimed at finding out the familiarity of the teachers with the school and the students, whereas number 3 was an attempt to know if all the teachers have the same opinion about 1403 group. Question 4 was asked to try to understand how teachers felt and if they had the same feeling I had and question 5 was intended to see if the teachers were aware of the influence the environment causes on the students' behaviour. Finally, question 6 was created to gather some ideas of what teachers believed they could do to try to change the situation.

Supplementary to these two PEPAS, I wrote a diary of my classes during the period of the research. In this diary, I recorded students' behavior while doing the activity.

4. Let's understand!

According to Allwright (1999, p.2) understanding in EP means “having an adequate sense of how things work for the purpose of making practical decisions about how to proceed”. In my classes I used to try to be very much in control and I did not accept to share with the students aspects of my life or their lives outside the school environment. I had the belief that if I did that I would risk losing control and they would misbehave more. Some students had never seemed interested in what we were doing and it was extremely frustrating. During our PEPA we came closer than any group had before, because I started to feel part of their lives and the frustration gave way to a feeling of satisfaction with my job. I could notice that students were really surprised when I mentioned that I wanted to listen to their opinions about their lives and our classes. However, some students took a long time to understand my interest and refused to take part in the PEPA because they said it was not about our Zip from Zog book. Below there is a quotation extracted from the diary where I used to record what happened in our classes at that time.

(...) The first thing they asked: is it to copy, teacher? Almost everybody did that. They seemed to be surprised, but inattentive and they didn't want to talk at first. They threw paper airplanes, hit their classmates, but I got some good and interesting ideas. We tried to say the things in English. At the end, I asked them to draw or write what they said on paper. Some refused doing that because it was not on the book. (Caroline's diary, 12/09/2013)

I already knew that students liked games, such as tic-tac-toe and hot potato, and I was aware that they were fond of drawing, although they were older than the other children in any fourth grade classes. However, they used to throw their books on the ground and tear the pages and because of these actions I had the belief that the English book did not appeal to them. The PEPA and the conversation I had about it proved I was terribly wrong. They said they liked the book and the activities proposed. After their statement I asked: Why do you refuse doing the book activities? Why don't you take care of the material appropriately? One boy said “It's our way, teacher”.

Besides, in the course of the exploratory conversations with the other teachers of 1403 group, the Reading teacher said: “The kids in 1403 group don't like when they

have to write! They prefer to play a game or watch a film”. I already knew that they had this preference.

(...) The students went to visit a museum and there were only three students in the classroom. I showed them some videos about topics from our previous classes. They liked a lot. (Caroline's diary, 06/09/2013)

The Reading teacher argues that these students do not believe they are capable of learning due to their lack of confidence in themselves. Below there is an extract of her opinion about them.

(...) The majority of the class doesn't like when they have to write. They like to dominate their peers and when they show they can't write or read well they feel vulnerable and they don't like it. They are afraid of talking and writing. They don't believe they can learn because of their low self-esteem (Exploratory conversations, 19/12/2013).

According to one of the boys, “We don't know Portuguese. We can't learn English”. It is common sense that students cannot learn English at regular schools, however, I had always believed that students wanted to learn the language and teachers, lessons and materials did not provide them such learning opportunities. I have always been there with the best will in trying to teach English with a quality material and they did not want to receive what I had to offer. It was out of my understanding.

Throughout the PEPAS conducted, with the students and the teachers, the point that all the teachers and students agreed is that 1403 is a real intemperate group. 1403 students mentioned that they do not like the fights and the mess in the classroom. The 1403 group teacher said that they cannot keep quiet and so, tease their peers all the time. She believes they do this because of their family backgrounds. The PE teacher looks proud when she says they respect her, but she also complains about the lack of respect among the students. According to her, they reproduce in her classes what they live in the neighborhood. Let's observe one of my diaries' entries:

(...) One student made a paper gun and pointed at me, simulating a gunshot. I interrupted the conversation and I told him: come on, don't do that, I'm not an enemy! He stopped and started doing another thing on his notebook. I continued with the class (Caroline's diary, 19/09/2013).

I needed to understand what classroom life was like for each teacher that worked with the 1403 group, so I asked them: How do you feel when you enter the room 1403? And during the class? What makes you feel that way? The answers were the following:

The PE teacher	I feel really uncomfortable. The lack of respect and bullying is the main problem.
The Reading teacher	I feel anguished. The class isn't good for me and for the students. Indiscipline results in these terrible moments. I think students lost their identities cause of their ages. My class is only for a group of few students who pay attention. They only want to watch videos.
The 1403 group teacher	I don't feel anything; I'm a really calm person. I never think: ouch! I have to face one more day with them! I feel happy because I like the school. With me they aren't aggressive, they are receptive. They play with me, kiss me and even complain when I get late. I like our relationship.

This lack of respect mentioned by the PE teacher was the same in the English classes. One of the oldest boys said once that he hated me. From this very moment on, I decided I had to understand the reason of that hatred. The PEPA made me see that the group did not hate me. They just did not like some attitudes I used to have when trying to control their behavior, such as calling their attention. I did not know they were uncomfortable with some of my attitudes, for instance, shouting at them and using the microphone. We could never have quality of life in the classroom with that coercive posture. I thought this posture would bring order to the classes, but that never seemed effective.

(...) The classroom was really noisy. I had to speak using my microphone. The students didn't want to pay attention to anything I proposed to them. I had to write on the board to make them quiet. When I arrived in the teachers' room, the Art teacher told me that they said they would "zoar o plantão" (kid around) in the English class and that they hated me. I got really frustrated (Caroline's diary, 05/09/2013)

The only teacher who did not have a negative feeling when in class was the 1403 group teacher, who said she felt at ease with them. I could notice during the conversations with the PE and the Reading teacher that they felt as disappointed as me. The Reading teacher described the feeling of anguish and the P.E. teacher mentioned she felt really uncomfortable, while the 1403 group teacher said she did not feel anything in their presence. She is not used to thinking: 'Ouch! I have to face one more day with them!' as all the teachers secretly commented in the teachers' room.

The teachers' answers to the question 'how do you feel when you enter room 1403' made me relate to the process of understanding. What puzzled me could not be what puzzled my co-workers because understanding is something really individual, a personal interpretation. I needed to work in order to understand our classroom life and also understand myself, but certainly the teachers had other understandings.

In relation to students' performance during the classes, I asked the fellow teachers: What do you think of the performance of 1403 in your classes? Why? Why do you think so? Why do they have this performance? Why do they behave like this? The answers were the following:

The PE teacher	I'm not satisfied, but they respect me and they like PE. The problem I face is the lack of respect among the students.
The Reading teacher	It's regular. There are two groups: one that is really good and interested in the classes and the other which depends on the activity (...).
The 1403 group teacher	I don't know, I think they have a regular performance, because of discipline. They can't stay quiet, they

	tease their peers all the time. I believe they do this because of their family backgrounds.
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At the beginning of my research I used to believe that Exploratory Practice would be really good for my professional life. As time passed by, I got to the conclusion that I could not separate the person I am from the teacher I am. Quality of life in our classroom would reflect in our quality of life outside it. Exploratory Practice brings the possibility of ‘work’ being a form of life and ‘life’ a form of ‘work’ (GIEVE; MILLER, 2006, p.20).

Concerning the reflection of life in Serrinha, which is dominated by drug factions, in our school practice, I tried to understand the teachers’ position in relation to students’ behavior. I asked the question: Do you see any relationship between what happens in the community and what happens during the class?

The PE teacher	Totally. They don’t know what peace is. They don’t sleep and there are bandits on the streets. They see it as a normal routine.
The Reading teacher	I think it’s totally related to it. It’s because of the community that they think they have the domain of the school. They see the teachers and staff as foreigners, because all of them live outside the community. They always want to make clear they have the power (guns, drugs, etc).
The 1403 group teacher	Totally. It’s part of their school routine and it interferes a lot in their behaviour.

Everybody stated that the conflicts interfere a lot. The Reading teacher believes that students think that the fact that they are from the community leads them to intimidate and try to dominate the school, taking into account that all the teachers, staff

and even some students live outside it, in other nearby communities. The 1403 group and the PE teacher said violence is in their routine, “they don’t know what peace is. They don’t sleep and there are bandits on the streets. They see it as a normal routine”.

Reading my diaries from the days I conducted the PEPA in 1403 class, I realized that almost every day I had recorded a violent situation, such as students pointing their hands at me as if they were carrying guns, writing drug factions abbreviations on their material or on the board and hitting and threatening their classmates. Let’s observe some of my diary entries.

Caroline’s diary, 12/09/2013	(...) they threw paper airplanes and hit their classmates (...)
Caroline’s diary, 19/09/2013	One student made a paper gun and pointed at me, simulating a gunshot (...)
Caroline’s diary, 26/09/2013	I arrived greeting the kids with HI, EVERYONE! GOOD MORNING! And two students, from their places, were imitating guns pointed at me! (...)

In order to close our sequence of conversations, I wanted to collect some ideas of what teachers believed they could do to try to change this violent situation at the school.

The PE teacher	I talk a lot to them about respect. I get tired and stressed but I think it’s the only way. Teachers have to reprimand them. I think we teachers contribute to the students’ low self-esteem and we have to police ourselves.
The Reading teacher	I don’t think teachers can do much to improve the relationship between students and teachers/staff/direction at the school. I think it’s nice to show

	good examples. We have to work in order to make students aware that the world is not only the community.
The 1403 group teacher	I talk a lot to them about that and I think that it's the only way to make them aware. I understand this relationship because it's part of their routine to be like that. I highlight all the time that they are safe when at school.

All of them believed that it is important to make students aware of their attitudes and show that values, such as mutual respect and tolerance are essential in our lives. Everybody said they talked a lot to the students and I took the opportunity to ask when they used to see an opportunity to talk about it with our students. They said that they only did it when students needed a reprimand. While we teachers are talking to them, they pay attention and listen to us. However, I ask myself if they just hear us (perceive the sound) or if they can also listen to us (derive meaning from what is being said). The Reading teacher believes that we cannot do much, so this is what remains.

I wish I could have talked to everybody involved with the 1403 group, but unfortunately due to time constraints it was not possible. Although the time I spent doing the PEPAS with the students and teachers made me feel anxious, because they were my first exploratory experience at the school. However, it was really rewarding to get to some new understandings about students and co-workers. Some understandings were precursors of changes!

5. Concluding Understandings

Exploratory Practice is sometimes responsible for changes. When we prioritize understanding it does not mean we are against changes (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.300). My decision was to take action for understanding rather than for change (once, while taking the discipline Issues in Research Methodology I, I considered working with Action Research, which prioritizes changes and I do not regret I have changed my mind). My first step was to contemplate the situation I was living so I could understand it better. Some changes occurred while this investigation was being carried out, but the most important change occurred in my own behaviour.

I used to blame myself for students' lack of interest in my classes as I did not feel I was a good teacher to them. I worked so hard not only to teach a good class but also to be there at the school and students did not like me and did not learn what I was teaching. Finally, I understood that learning also depends on the learners. One of the great achievements was the understanding that being part in the decision-making process motivates students. You can have the best materials and resources, but if you do not let your students have a voice in the classroom, you will never get students motivated.

The 1403 group was a special one, because they helped me to understand that sometimes teachers have beliefs that have not been questioned. Findings indicated that students liked the English book and to my surprise they liked their English teacher. It was even more surprising to see that students did not like their own behaviour. They complained a lot about the noise and the fights in the classroom. Actually, their conduct did not change much but they started to show some motivation in our classes.

I wasn't feeling good, but I entered the classroom greeting them in a cheerful way. Everybody was there and I said that we would look at our new book and decide the most interesting topics together. They seemed so excited, they love receiving new things. I wrote on the board what they said they were interested in: ROUTINE, ABILITIES and FOOD. We started the unit: My everyday life. It seemed they liked it and they were motivated. (Caroline's diary, 10/10/2013)

The group finally had a voice in the English class. From September to the end of the year, students had the opportunity to vote for the most interesting topics on the book for us to work. However, they kept on misbehaving at the school and being reason for

comments at the teachers' room. Observing the small changes, I started to feel more motivated too and the fifty minutes per week did not seem like a burden anymore. I was also able to understand my colleagues and realize that I was not alone when feeling frustrated, except for the 1403 teacher.

The data provided interesting perceptions about social changes. I will never be able to stop violence in the school or even in the community. As an exploratory teacher, I will always prioritize quality of life in the learning environment, but what I understand as quality of life in the classroom may not be what my fellow teachers understand or what my students seek for.

So, the school year reached an end. Some of the 1403 students failed again, one boy quit the school and moved to another city and some teachers still call me to talk about the many things that happened. I started the year on a license and probably I will not return to Serrinha's school. One of the greatest things that happened to me during these three years teaching there was being able to understand the 1403 students. The scenario changed and the year came to an end but it does not mean my research is over.

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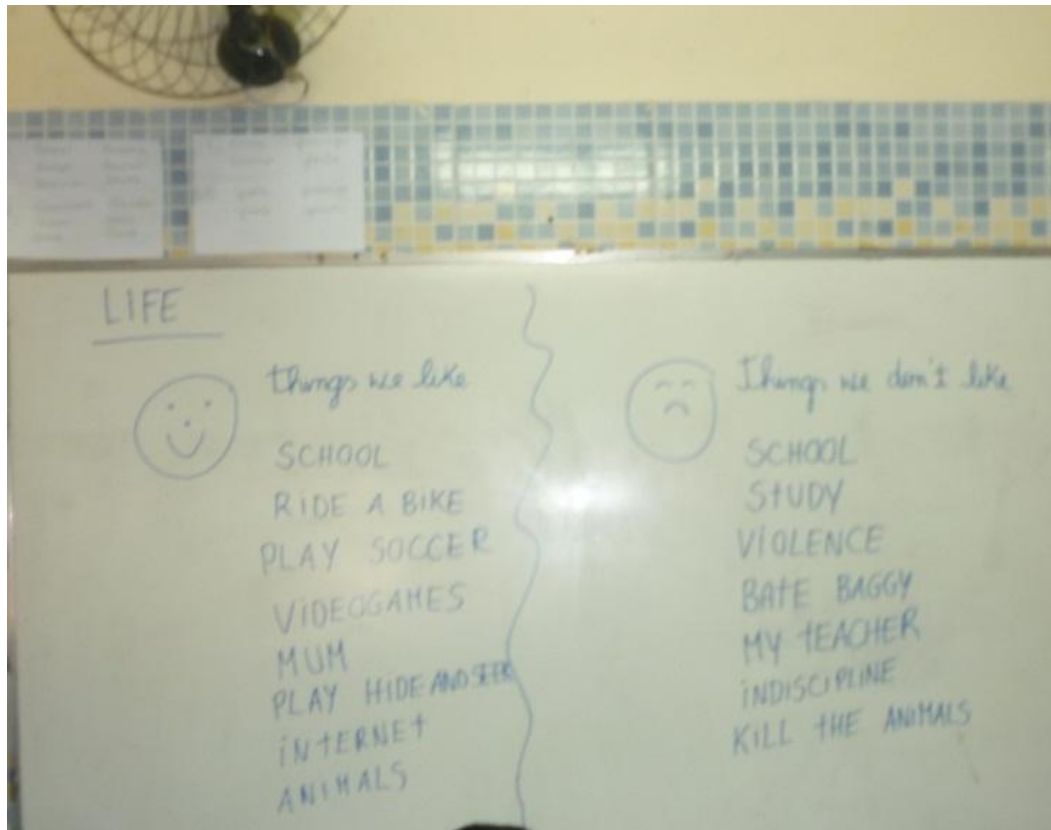
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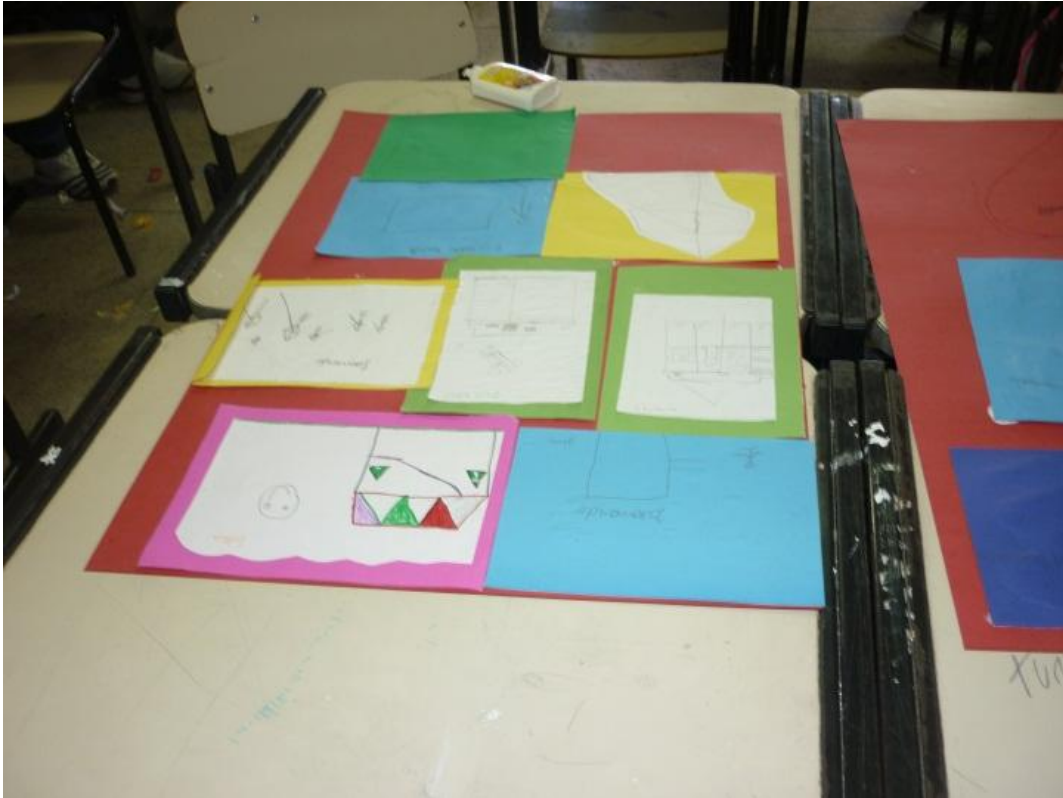
Appendix



Picture 1: first step of 1403 PEPA.



Picture 2: 1403 students' likes and dislikes in sentences and drawings.



Picture 3: poster with 1403 students' likes and dislikes.