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Age as a factor in SLA: adults among adolescents in the classroom

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Abstract

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While a great deal of research is found on the issues of age in second language acquisition (SLA), little has been said in terms of adults learning English among adolescents in the same classroom environment. The aim of this paper is not only to look at two interviews I conducted with two adult students through the lenses of Andragogy, but also analyze the quality of the answers they provided me with. Findings point toward a direction beyond the issues of cerebral plasticity and inability to mock native-like accuracy.

Keywords: age interference, andragogy, adults, adolescents

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Given that maturation has the strong influence on second language outcomes that our review has indicated, it should come as no surprise that native-like proficiency is unattainable [for adults]”
(HYLTENSTAM&ABRAHAMSSON, 2003, p. 578).

“The misconception that adults cannot master foreign languages is as widespread as it is erroneous”
(MARINOVA-TODD, MARSHALL, & SNOW, 2000, p. 27).

Language learning research has proved to be one immersed in contradictions and opposing views regarding many different sub-topics. However, one view which causes heated ongoing debate is that of the influence of age in second language acquisition. The literature in the field presents us with the notion of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), according to which there is a time span in which foreign languages are better learned. Fully introduced as a theory by Lenneberg in 1967, the CPH contends that any kind of learning that takes place beyond a maturational point specified by the theory itself is doomed to failure. Some radical views, such as in the first quotation above, see no possibility of overcoming this obstacle, whereas others are more flexible, leaving room for questioning and potential solutions. Thus, the great amount of research found is solid proof that age has a rather close connection to Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

For years, children have been considered the best language learners, because they can learn it fast and attain native-like proficiency almost effortlessly. Conversely, adults are hopeless in reaching a desirable sufficient level of mastery of a foreign language (MARINOVA-TODD, MARSHALL, & SNOW, 2000). Apparently, the younger have a more plastic brain permitting languages to be acquired implicitly, while the older have to cope with both physiological and affective issues, such as brain plasticity and motivation, respectively. Nonetheless, postulating an age limit for learning or acquiring a language is as impossible as measuring levels of learning, or how it takes place in the human brain. Thus, no consensus has been reached among researchers

in the area, and the question whether the CPH affects, or not, the language learning process remains unanswered.

After this brief introduction, which will be further elaborated, I move on to the scope of this present study. I have been an English teacher in a private language course for eight years now. Honestly speaking, teaching was never a career I thought of pursuing back in high school, but as a passionate student of the English language, I realized how close I was to being a teacher, and finally decided to go for it. My first experience as a teacher, around nine years ago while I was still an undergraduate student at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), brought me into contact with groups made up of adults only, because there was a minimum age of 18 to enroll in the course. Consequently, I spent the last two years of college teaching adults and paying attention to their special needs. At the same time, I started working at the private course (where I am still teaching), and again with two adult groups. However, one semester later, I began teaching a third group, but this time, it consisted of not only adults but also adolescents, something that called my attention to the issue of age difference in the foreign language classroom. In other words, the moment adolescents stepped into the picture, I took notice of a gap in terms of how faster adolescents were.

Before finding out about numerous papers and research reports on it, I came across the concept of Andragogy, a term coined by Alexander Kapp, a German educator from 1833, which was developed into a theory in 1968 at Boston University by Malcolm Knowles, who defined it as a system of ideas, concepts, and approaches to adult learning. In spite of the rise and development of this theory, little research has been carried out in this area, especially in terms of age

difference in the classroom, which happens to be the aim of this research paper. However, I would like to mention something noteworthy as far as the scope of this study goes. When I use the phrase *age difference*, I am referring to the variety of ages in the same classroom. Part of our reality in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil is the fact that the groups of students that we teach are quite often formed by adults and adolescents, e.g. over the age of 15. Having said that, I started looking for other studies with at least a similar scope, but to my surprise, I have found none. On the other hand, I have stumbled upon a great number of published articles, books, dissertations, or whatsoever related to what the best age to learn a second or foreign language is, all of them based on analyses drawn after collecting data from groups consisting of adults only learning a second language. The works of Birdsong (1999), Krashen (1975) and Lenneberg (1967), to name but a few, approach age under this perspective. Nevertheless, as I said before, what I have decided to investigate differs from what these researchers have so thoroughly studied, even though I used their theories as academic support for this present study, which aims at describing the behavior of adult students among teenagers in an English class.

It is common ground among English teachers and researchers in SLA that the earlier one starts learning a language, the easier the process is. We all have heard this hypothesis in the schools where we work, and in my case, even some of my adult students have come to me asking if they would ever learn a second language, once they were too old to master its several skills, such as speaking and listening, to name but a few. Such notion is so ingrained in people's minds that they simply decide to take it as a universal truth. Surprisingly, I can say that I have heard it even from some fellow teachers, and had no hesitation in showing my utter disagreement with them. After pondering for some time on the topic and after being in contact with groups formed by

both adolescents and adults, I was finally able to make a decision on what would be my research topic.

The reality of different ages in the same classroom is a recurrent one. I could say that at the course where I work, none of my groups are entirely age-homogeneous, and many other groups follow suit. That struck me at first, because I had never had such an experience. I remember the first three groups I taught there consisted of adults over the age of 20. So, the moment I had to deal with different ages was a tricky one for me, or at least I thought it would be. As I believed they should be treated differently, my initial reaction was to frown upon the school's inability to manage and group students of the same age together, and to complain to my supervisors. Nevertheless, later on, I decided to leave things that way because of reasons that do not concern me as a language teacher; for example, students' conflicting schedules and financial reasons on the part of the school. Thus, I made up my mind as to what I should investigate. The first question that came into my mind was whether age difference influenced in the students' foreign language learning process and additionally, whether the teacher was influenced by it, and if yes, how. With this concern in mind, it is the purpose of this paper to provide not only a description of a few processes carried out in the classroom, but also an analysis that sheds more light on the topic, still a rather obscure field in English Language Teaching (ELT).

II. A FOREWORD ON ANDRAGOGY

There seems to be little space for questioning the traditional form of instruction in Western countries, that is, pedagogy, or as it is widely known: a didactic or teacher-directed approach. And just as there seems to exist no single theory that can explain how learning takes place among young learners, few theories have emerged to suggest how adult learners learn. An innovative idea related to instructing adults, and one that gained momentum in the past four decades, has been dubbed Andragogy. In this section of the present study, I aim to provide some background information regarding both pedagogy and andragogy.

The pedagogical model of instruction dates back from the Middle Ages, as it was developed in the monastic schools of Europe. Originally, and it is commonly known, young boys were educated by monks according to a system of instruction that required them to be obedient and loyal servants of the church (KNOWLES, 1984). The concept of pedagogy developed from this setting, and as centuries went by, it spread to the secular schools of Europe and America and, to the present day, remains the dominant form of instruction.

The term *pedagogy* derives from the Greek language, and it means “leading children”. Therefore, pedagogy has been defined as the art and science of teaching children. The model suggests that the teacher has full responsibility in the decision-making processes as to what will be learned, how, when and, later on testing if the content has been learned. Pedagogy, thus, places the student in a more passive role which demands obedience from the teacher. It is heavily based on the assumption that learners need to know what the teacher teaches them. The result is a teaching and learning situation that actively promotes dependency on the instructor (KNOWLES, 1984).

With the recent rise of schools and courses designed for adults, the pedagogical model has been applied equally to teaching adults irrespective of any especial needs to be cared for. In other words, a contradiction has been established, once a model intended for children was adopted for mature learners, who are presumably both independent and responsible for their own actions. Unlike children, adults are often motivated to learn by a sincere desire to solve immediate problems in their lives. Additionally, they tend to be more self-directed than their younger counterparts. These are just scant reasons why the pedagogical model does not account for changes that take place when people grow old, and thus generates “tension, resentment, and resistance in individuals” (KNOWLES, 1984, p. 40).

Andragogy is a concept first introduced by Malcolm Knowles in a 1970 book entitled “*The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy versus Pedagogy*”. By publishing the book and spreading the theory, Knowles attempted to differentiate learning in childhood from learning in adulthood. However, the concept of andragogy was thought of before Knowles' popularization of the term and many researchers debate the origin of it. Whereas some believe that it was first used in the United States in a published piece by Lindeman, an educator, as early as 1926, others suggest that Lindeman himself was influenced by the work of a German author of the 1920's, Eugene Rosenstock. Additionally, it is believed that the word was coined in 1833 by Kapp, a German educator.

As an alternative model of instruction, Andragogy has helped to alleviate all the discrepancies created, and to improve the teaching of adults. However, such development did not occur overnight. Knowles' contributions to this system have been numerous, and consequently, have influenced the thinking of countless adult educators. Moreover, they have been a healthy stimulant to the growth of the adult education field since 1970. Although there are different

hypothesis as to when the term was first used and how it is applied, Knowles provided a quite clear definition to the term as the art and science of helping adults learn. Ten years later, in a second edition of his 1970 book, he reconsidered his original conception of andragogy as a set of assumptions catering to only adult learners – the change in subtitles from *Andragogy Versus Pedagogy* to *From Pedagogy to Andragogy* accounts for his most recent conclusion that the use of andragogical and pedagogical principles is to be determined by the situation, and not by the age of the learner. In the 1980 edition, he suggested the following re-definition:

" . . . andragogy is simply another model of assumptions about adult learners to be used alongside the pedagogical model of assumptions, thereby providing two alternative models for testing out the assumptions as to their 'fit' with particular situations. Furthermore, the models are probably most useful when seen not as dichotomous but rather as two ends of a spectrum , with a realistic assumption (about learners) in a given situation falling in between the two ends"

(KNOWLES, 1980, p. 43).

As mentioned in the quotation above, Andragogy should not be seen as the opposite of Pedagogy. Instead, the two should complement one another, and their principles seem to overlap at times and, also, be applied to different situations. In other words, the principles I am going to list now might reflect both adults' and children's traits or needs. Initially, the andragogical model developed by Knowles was based on four of them; later on in the second edition of the book, he introduced an extra pair of principles. They are as follow: first and foremost, adult learners move from dependency to independency or self-directedness, which means that there exists some resistance once they feel either information or ideas are being imposed on them. Secondly, they carry a reservoir of experiences that can be used as a foundation on which to build learning, that is, they apply their life experiences to their learning experiences. Thirdly, adults are goal-oriented, meaning that they associate what they learn with the social roles they are expected to

perform. Finally, adult learners are more problem-centered, that is, they need to feel that what they are learning is applicable to immediate situations in everyday life, as opposed to amassing great amounts of knowledge for further use (KNOWLES, 1980).

The two new assumptions presented in the second edition of his book are closely related to the fourth one mentioned above and both have to do with motivation and relevance, respectively. The former affirms that mature learners are internally motivated to learn, for many different reasons which vary from self-esteem to desire to accomplish a goal. The latter suggests that they need to know why they are learning something because they are fully responsible for managing their own lives (KNOWLES, 1984). Again, I want to highlight the fact that all of these six principles may also account for profiles other than adults' only. We all know how children and adolescents need to be or feel motivated to learn, for example; or how they relate their life experiences, or bring them, to the classroom, which may affect their learning. Additionally, they need to feel the usefulness of what is being thought in order to keep on learning.

In describing his particular version of andragogy, Knowles associated it with a variety of instructional suggestions that he believed would facilitate the role of teaching for instructors and talked about ways of helping learners maximize their learning abilities. This new trend initiated by him promoted the rise of self-directed learning. To support his new approach to learning, he offered three explanations: (1) individuals who take initiative in educational activities seem to learn more and better than those who are passive learners; (2) developing an ability to take responsibility for life is a vital part of the maturation process; and (3) learners are constantly being expected to assume responsibility and initiative for their own learning. Somehow, all of these three reasons given by Knowles overlap, but they indicate that as individuals become adults, they require special attention as far as learning is concerned.

As is the case with many innovative theories, the way paved by Knowles has not been without critics. However, it is clear that andragogy has brought considerable attention to the adult education field and, according to its supporters, if applied correctly, the andragogical approach to teaching and learning in the hands of a skilled experienced teacher can make a positive impact on the adult learner.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

As it has been mentioned in the introduction to this study, the field of SLA is a contradiction-ridden one. There are several theories that cater to many different issues concerning language acquisition, and along with them there comes a huge load of debate and dispute. Nevertheless, two basic hypotheses deserve attention in the area. One of them is closely related to the Learning/Acquisition Hypothesis and the other has to do with the Affective Filter Hypothesis, both of which have been delineated by Krashen in a 1975 paper. And in spite of the fact that these two hypotheses could not be confirmed through any type of scientific research, they can be considered two important theoretical landmarks, and thus, be applied when examining age as a factor in SLA, especially the differences between children and adult learning.

The Learning-Acquisition hypothesis is described by Krashen as two different ways to look at second language development. However, although he defines these two ways as ‘the learning system’ and ‘the acquired system’, I myself prefer to look at them as a process rather than a system per se, and therefore, will refer to them as the learning process and the acquisition process. I believe that when Krashen uses the term ‘system’, he is referring to language as a final product, or an end to be achieved; and for academic reasons, I will define these two ways according to Krashen’s terminology, and later on, I will use my own. ‘The learning system’ is what he defines as language input in the classroom setting, either in schools or in courses. This system is a conscious process that involves studying grammar rules and vocabulary, for example. Also, it is a process of formal instruction and requires a conscious effort to acquire a language.

Unlike the learning system, the acquired system is an unconscious process which usually takes place not only in the school setting, but also in and outside of school (FREEMAN & FREEMAN, 2004). As a matter of fact, the school setting permeates the two systems since students both receive formal instruction and use language in communication among peers, for example. This process is similar to the one that children undergo as they acquire a first language in their family environment. According to Krashen, the acquisition system is more important than the learning system.

The second hypothesis deals with affective variables that a learner may encounter, and thus, is somehow related to potential age interference in the process. The variables which have to do with age can vary from self-consciousness in adults versus children, and its impact on language acquisition, to others such as motivation and anxiety. Krashen (1975) suggests that learners who are highly motivated and self-confident outperform those who are not. Additionally, he contends that a good self-image and a low level of anxiety contribute to better performance in learning a second language.

Many of the issues from Krashen's Theories are analyzed further in the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), a theory developed by Eric Lenneberg in his 1967's work entitled *Biological Foundations of Language*. In this book, he states that there is a limited developmental period during which it is possible to acquire a language, be it L1 or L2, to normal, native-like standards. Once this period is over, however, the ability to learn a language declines (BIRDSONG, 1999). Furthermore, Lenneberg suggested that the brain's disposition to acquire language is halted at

puberty with the onset of brain lateralization, a process which I will describe further in this section. As a consequence, the CPH has been widely disputed.

In addition to my initial research question, which has to do with a potential influence that different ages in the classroom have on the second language learning process of adult students, the so-called critical period for language learning is one of the issues that led me to carry out this study. Further developed with the rise of the CPH, the idea that there is a limited developmental period during which it is possible to acquire a language seems to be a noteworthy one, once nowadays there are many older children and adults learning foreign or second languages, either from formal instruction or from exposure to the target language (such is the case of immigrants and students in exchange programs).

The critical period for learning/acquiring a language is usually defined as lasting from about age 2 to puberty. After this window is closed, the natural acquisition of language is thought to be blocked by a loss of 'cerebral plasticity' resulting from the completion of cerebral development and lateralization (McLAUGHLIN, 1984). Thus, the explanation given by CPH-defenders is a physiological one.

It is widely known that the brain has different areas which are assigned different functions. A large amount of neurological evidence confirms that as the human brain matures these functions are 'lateralized' to the left or to the right hemispheres of the brain (FREEMAN & FREEMAN, 2004). Language is one of the functions located in the left hemisphere. The process of lateralization begins at about age 2. Nevertheless, there is little consensus among researchers as

to when it reaches completion. This is a strong argument against the CPH, and one that makes this theory controversial as there is not a definite end point in brain lateralization. However, some have agreed upon the fact that by puberty, the brain is almost completely lateralized into two hemispheres.

As evidence in favor of this argument, children who acquire a second language before puberty usually speak without an accent. On the other hand, older learners generally display phonetic interference from their mother tongue. With this in mind, researchers have proposed that humans are no longer able to acquire some aspects of language once the brain is fully lateralized and that language function is assigned to the left hemisphere. This coincides with the CPH in that there is a critical period for language acquisition, which is prior to complete brain lateralization (FREEMAN & FREEMAN, 2004).

To add more support to this hypothesis, Penfield & Roberts (1959), two of the first theorists to support the idea of a critical period, suggest that 'for the purposes of learning languages, the human brain becomes progressively stiff and rigid after the age of nine' (PENFIELD & ROBERTS, 1959, p. 236) and that 'when languages are taken up for the first time in the second decade of life, it is difficult ... to achieve a good result ... because it is unphysiological' (PENFIELD & ROBERTS, 1959, p. 255).

In the end, the CPH contends that children are better learners than adults because their brains are specially programmed to learn languages, whereas those of adults have reached a complete rate of lateralization and are not 'plastic' enough to learn a second language. Moreover, McLaughlin

(1984) regards the innate ability of young children to acquire a language quickly and efficiently, and without an accent, as support for the Critical Period Hypothesis.

As is the case with many theories, the CPH displays many issues. The most frequently pointed out relates to the time limit. It is quite problematic to state a definite age period in which learners can or cannot learn a language. Research shows that the notion of puberty is not a clear-cut one in terms of age, so what can be an end point for some could work perfectly well as the best period for others. Singleton (2000), in a review of the relevant studies for language acquisition, found several ages cited as the so-called critical period (CP). These conflicting findings undermine the initial suggestion that a CP does exist. Furthermore, there is a great deal of debate as to when the process of lateralization is completed. The multiplicity of critical periods suggested by Singleton has to do with the fact that phonetic and phonological functions, for example, are the first ones to achieve completion. Alternatively, Seliger (1975) argues that functions related to syntax and semantics tend to reach such stage later on, making it more acquirable later in life.

Other researchers support the theory of multiple CPs. Diller (1981) argues that different brain cells are associated with different functions. He claims that pyramidal cells are responsible for phonetic/phonological acquisition and it is developed by age 6/8, whereas stellate cells, which he links with higher-order functions, like semantics and syntax, reach maturation points over two to three decades of age. Therefore, he concludes that authentic L2 accents can be acquired only by young children whereas cognitive aspects of L2s (such as semantics and syntax) can be learned by relatively mature people.

Scovel (1988) also regards pronunciation and its many issues as the first area of language to reach lateralization, claiming that it has a 'neuromuscular basis.' He argues that other areas of language are acquired differently because they do not, unlike phonetics/phonology, require a 'physical' disposition. Additionally, his study suggests that those who are exposed to a second language after 12 cannot ever 'pass themselves off as native speakers phonologically' (SCOVEL, 1988, p. 185).

Other studies also have neurobiological foundations, including that of Schumann (1994) who put forward a process called myelination, after the substance myelin contained in brain cells. His study claims that myelination reduces plasticity in the hemisphere of the brain assigned for languages after puberty, and consequently, this is the reason why age interferes in language acquisition.

Based on these assumptions and theories, I have decided to look for elements that could corroborate them, or not. The following section will focus on how I conducted this piece of research on a possible influence of age on adults' learning of English among teenagers in a free course.

IV. METHODS

This present study aims at investigating whether different ages in the same foreign language classroom can interfere in older students' learning process. In order to try to find an answer to my initial research question, I conducted two interviews in Portuguese with adult students who are part of age-mixed groups, that is, groups formed both by adolescents and adults. My decision to not use English in the interviews was to let them feel more at ease with the situation, and thus, facilitate the process. The questions were translated and are included in this section in English, but can be found in the Appendices section in Portuguese. The first interviewee, Bete, is a forty-nine-year-old woman, mother of two daughters aged eighteen and twenty-one years old, who studied with me for a year back in 2013. However, due to professional reasons and to the fact that she did not attain a grade high enough to continue studying, she decided to quit the course at the last module of the basic level (there are four modules in this level). She works as a psychologist in the Human Resources area, conducting tests on people who are applying for legal ownership of guns. The second interviewee, Susana, is a fifty-three year old woman, married without children, and is currently a student of mine in the last module of the advanced level (there are three modules in this level). She works as a secretary at the same English course where I teach, but has a post-graduation degree in Psycho-pedagogy. Although they differ in terms of level of proficiency and the first one has discontinued being a student, their profiles are somewhat similar, once they fit the description of adult students among adolescents. Furthermore, I would like to add that the small number of students interviewed makes it

impossible to pose a general truth on the subject. My goal here is not to state something, but rather, discuss what the students shared with me.

The interviews were designed to engage both students in an environment where they could speak their minds in relation to their experience learning English in the setting described above. I divided the interview in four sections. The first one provides us with background information on the students, like their names, their family, their daily routines and their occupations. The second one, and the most relevant, I would say, goes straight to the point I wanted to investigate, containing questions such as: “Do you think the methodology adopted facilitates the learning process for students your age?”; “What do you think about different ages inside the same classroom? Does/did it bother you?” e “Do you think children and adolescents learn more easily?”, among others. The third section presents the questions about motivation to learn a foreign language and, consequently, what led them to start a course. Finally, the last section consists of questions on their opinion about learning a foreign language, in this case, English, at an older age; and its importance in a globalized world. During each section there were follow-up questions which pertain to each student, and are therefore, specific to that interview. Even though they were paramount for my analysis, they were not included in the original set of questions, which is as follows.

Section 1 (Personal background):

- 1) What's your name?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) What's your profession? What's your field of work? What does your job consist of?
- 4) Tell me a little about your family.

Section 2 (Focus on the research topic):

- 1) How long have/had you studied at the course?
- 2) What's your opinion about the methodology? Do you think it facilitates the learning process for students your age?
- 3) What do you think about different ages inside the same classroom? Does/did it bother you?

- 4) Do you think children and adolescents learn more easily? What about adults?
- 5) How did/do you feel inside the classroom among your younger classmates? Did/do you feel inhibited or ashamed of making mistakes?
- 6) Would you feel more comfortable in a group consisting of adults only?
- 7) Do you think adults learn as fast as adolescents?
- 8) On a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is the highest level, how much do you think Portuguese interferes in your learning of English?
- 9) In your opinion, what's the role of teacher who teaches age-mixed groups? Do you think it should be an issue, or they should teach regardless of the age difference?

Section 3 (Motivational issues):

- 1) What encouraged you to study English? Was it a personal or professional resolution?
- 2) Is/was there any sort of requirement to learn a foreign language or did you decide to do it because you wanted to?
- 3) Do you have any family members or friends who also study or speak English?

Section 4 (Learning English and the globalized world):

- 1) For you, what does it feel like to learn a second language? When you first stepped into an English class, how did you feel? Was there any kind of personal achievement?
- 2) Do you think that learning a second language is important for your mental health?
- 3) What about in today's globalized world?
- 4) Do you speak English in your everyday life? If not, why? If yes, how?

Both interviews were recorded using my cell phone, and later transcribed, in order to facilitate the three analyses I drew, all of which are included further on in the analysis section. The first two are, in fact, overviews I wrote after listening to the recorded interviews. I decided to do it this way in order to help prepare for the third and final analysis, which is paramount for this study. Also, I selected some extracts which I considered relevant, translated them into English and transcribed them here. The original extracts in Portuguese are included in Appendix 2 at the end of this monograph. The third analysis is the main one, which I drew using the scope of Andragogy and tried to find some of its elements in the student's answers.

Another theoretical framework used in this monograph is that of Grounded Theory (GT) which claims that individuals who go through similar experiences somewhat belong to a given category that may serve as the basis for future theory (HUTCHINSON, 1993). In other words, what lies

behind GT is the notion that theory derives from data. From analyzing the qualitative data gathered in the interviews, I tried to find an answer to my initial research question.

V. ANALYSIS

As I mentioned in the section above, I have decided to include in this monograph the two overviews on the interviews I conducted. A more practical and more hands-on sub-section, it helped me to write the final analysis, which is of utmost importance to this study.

v.i) Overview of Bete's interview

While the initial section of this interview was a more introductory one, containing questions of personal background and so on and serving as a kick-start for the other parts, the second section, which consists of the most pertaining questions to my research topic, is the most relevant to the present study, I believe. The interviewee, Bete, showed little hesitation in stating her point of view on different ages in the same classroom, which, according to her, is a major issue and affects adults' learning process, especially for her who was a real beginner student. Being so, one noteworthy aspect of her answers to my questions was that she gives an enormous importance to oral skills, and emphasizes it throughout the whole interview whenever she had a chance. Additionally, I highlighted some parts which show us how she felt misplaced sometimes during the class:

1: "I think that English courses in general tend to prioritize younger learners, maybe because of the job Market. However, there are many middle-aged, or even, older people who are interested in learning English, and when you realize that oral skills are paramount and few courses cater to it, adopting a methodology intended for either kids or adolescents, you end up feeling like...a fish out of water."

Even though she was not the only adult in the group – there were two, in fact –, they were the minority in a class formed by fourteen students, twelve of which were adolescents. Although the extract above shows an overlap of ideas between the importance she places on speaking and the appropriateness of the contents students are exposed to in class, it becomes clear from her answer that both were disadvantages for her, which is further emphasized in this section when I asked if she would feel more comfortable in an adult-only group:

2: “It would be great. Awesome. And by doing that, it becomes clear that there is an impairment for adults, which, in my opinion, English courses should tackle more efficiently. Not to mention the oral skills, which are very important nowadays, and should be the focus. After all, it’s the most useful and most required skill when applying for a job, and adults have very little to time to listen to music or watch videos, right? There’s no time for that, so they are constantly lagging behind in class.”

The fact that she places a huge importance on oral skills, either because it is the most difficult part to achieve due to a busy daily routine or the most required part in the job market, is evident in the extracts above. This made me wonder whether she is aware of other skills involved in learning a foreign language and how important they also are. What serves as an explanation to this may be the fact that there is a heavy focus on speaking at the course in question, and students are required to do extremely well in the oral test so as to pass to the following module. Other skills, like reading and writing, are somewhat not so paramount.

Nevertheless, she affirms that English courses should be able to group adults with adults only, which, for her, would make her feel more comfortable, as mentioned in the second extract above. The fourth question in this section is about children and adolescents learning more easily than adults. Her answer was very straightforward, which corroborates how adults see themselves as slower than younger ones, and which somehow supports the CPH:

3: “Oh, for sure. They are ‘decontaminated’, and we are ‘contaminated’ by life, by our duties, by our routine and daily chores, which are numerous. That is, it’s easier for them to learn something, not to mention their age, also.

Even though she did not mention any scientific research of the kind in her answer, her last sentence may serve as proof. Further on, she adds the following when I asked her if adults learn as fast as adolescents:

4: “No, absolutely not, especially because of the age, and all the burden of daily chores and worries. Besides, there’s the memory, which is not much of a help. Theirs is extremely fresh.”

The fact that she considers the adolescents’ memory “fresher” has a lot to do with the existence of a critical period for learning a language. However, we will never be able to say whether it really exists or not. After listening and transcribing her interview, my initial conclusion is that adults need to feel they are learning something appropriate for them, or relevant for their lives. As far as I am concerned, the fact that they may feel more comfortable with other adults does not mean that they require special attention and, therefore, should be treated specially. The opposite could also happen if adolescents were the minority in a group of adults. After all, it is a matter of different profiles with different features that influence their learning. Here, I would like to show her opinion when I asked about the teacher’s role in mixed groups:

5: “I guess that the teacher is supposed to know how to make different ages interact, and fit everybody in the same group, both adolescents and adults. A lot of effort must be made in order to promote more interaction, or even to give more attention. However, this could also affect the adolescents negatively. They could feel mistreated. I think that putting apart these two different groups would be better. It has nothing to do with discrimination or prejudice. It’s about adults’ special needs, something that all middle-aged people face, especially when compared to younger ones.”

What called my attention in this extract is the fact that she is perfectly aware that adults need to feel part of the group as a whole, without any kind of discrimination on the part of the teacher. In other words, the teacher is responsible for trying to overcome the potential age barrier existing

among the students and integrating all members of the group regardless of age constraints. Nonetheless, by the end of her answer, she states that adolescents themselves would feel in disadvantage if the teacher did so, and thus, she concludes affirming that the best solution would be to study with same-age students.

The two last sections of the interview have a different focus, but are somehow related to adult learning as well. When asked about motivation issues, the interviewee answered that what prompted her to start learning a foreign language was a personal decision; that is, there was no professional requirement that she speak English, even though she affirms that it would bring professional contribution as well.

6: “No. It was my own decision, once it would help me professionally.”

Again, it is quite surprising to see how she sometimes links her ideas. In the following extract, not only does she show sympathy for the ability to speak English, which might contribute for her learning process, but also she is conscious about the importance of speaking a language for professional growth.

7: “Well, I like it, I think it’s important in the job market. I think it’s ‘cool’ to listen to people speaking English fluently, and this is what companies are looking for, right?”

Her sympathy with English or willingness to learn the language may also influence the whole learning process. When she used the adjective ‘cool’ (‘bacana’) to describe her idea of having contact with the language, or hearing people speaking it, I myself wondered why so many students create a barrier against English, even if the fact that by learning it, it will bring them better opportunities. Her level of open-mindedness struck me in such a positive way, once the

tendency among adult students is exactly the opposite. Later on, she continues to share her opinion about the time she studied in the course, and the outcome of it.

8: "What's funny about it is that sometimes I go to places and see somebody speaking the language, and I can understand what they are saying, even though I studied for a short time. I think it's amazing."

She finishes the third section by stating her point of view on oral tests. All English teachers, and students, know how problematic they can be, either because speaking is more spontaneous or, maybe, usually, the hardest skill to be learned and mastered. She points out that being tested orally can be a stressful experience, and may bring students to a standstill.

9: "It's obvious that high grades in the oral test should be required, but if it were something more relaxed, not so demanding in terms of the grade itself, maybe adults could learn more easily. When you take an oral test, you feel scared and stressed, which becomes an obstacle even if you have studied before. You just halt and keep thinking you will mispronounce words, and so on. So, I believe there should be more effort in catering to adults in the language class."

The last section, and the briefest one, deals with her notion of adult learning as a whole, and here, she affirmed that we are never too old learn new things. Although she contended that adults should be grouped together, for her, there seems to be no critical period whatsoever, like many researchers claim. Personally, I believe, and she does too, that mixed ages in the same group can hinder adults' learning process.

10: "I think that learning is always important for our mental health. Few of us have the opportunity to study, but it's interesting. It seems like we are back in school, or learning how to walk again, or speak. Besides, you have a lot of life experience, which makes you question yourself: 'Wow, I'm kind of learning everything again from scratch. Or learning the ABC's, but of another language.'"

As far as learning English in a globalized world goes, she stated that we live in a fast-paced world which demands a huge load of interaction among people living in faraway places.

However, although she makes little use of English in her daily life, she is fully aware of the importance of speaking a foreign language, as can be seen in the following extract:

11: “Extremely important, especially English. It’s very important. Nowadays, everything is so fast. What happens in Japan reaches you in a very short time.”

Overall, I found this first interview rather elucidating in terms of showing me how adults can feel uncomfortable in the presence of adolescents while learning a foreign language. The interviewee was very receptive in sharing her experiences and points of view, even though she sometimes sounded a little confusing. Since her first days as my student, she had demonstrated a level of friendliness that made her stand out. The other adult student did not exhibit the same personality trait, but unfortunately she did not accept my invitation to be interviewed. Another relevant point of this interview has to do with the cerebral plasticity notion mentioned in some of the papers I read for this study, some of which may sound rather inappropriate nowadays but were the trend at their time, claiming that adults will never be able to learn **a foreign or second language** properly. We all know that it is impossible to measure learning, or make sure if a student really learned something we taught. Nevertheless, if cerebral plasticity does exist, and is something available for children or adolescents, the course methodology in question should not be offered to adults, once it is heavily based on memorization and oral repetition; that is, skills dependent on cerebral properties which are lost after puberty.

v.ii) Overview of Susana's interview

This second interview follows the same pattern used in the first one. The initial section focuses on introductory questions about the interviewee's personal background, such as her age, profession and education. Susana is one of my advanced students who is about to finish the last module in the course where I work. She is 53 years old and married, and has been working as a secretary in the same course for more than twenty years, and states that she has a special liking to learning languages (it is important to note here that she had already studied English during her adolescence at another course, and back in the 90's in the same course as today's, so she is a student for the third time in her life – she thinks that she needs the contact with the language so as not to forget everything she learned in the past. This gives her a totally different profile from Bete, who was a real adult beginner). Additionally, Susana has a post-grad certificate in Psychopedagogy, which I believe has somehow contributed to her recent years as a student and also to her self-consciousness as an adult among teenagers.

Unlike Bete, the first interviewee, she has a more 'receptive' attitude towards the age difference in the same classroom. The fact they have different backgrounds and different levels of English, or that Susana is studying in order to keep in touch with what she has learned before and not as a starter, may serve as a two-edged sword for this paper. On one hand, it may be argued that different subjects cannot be compared in such terms. On the other hand, my research does not focus on how much the students have learned or how fluent they are in the language. What I am looking at in this present study is the age difference in the same classroom, which in these terms, both of them fit properly, regardless of their levels.

After answering briefly my questions on her personal and educational background, I asked if she had an idea of teaching methodologies. And as she had been a student in another course, she draws a clear-cut comparison between what she was used to in the past and to what she has been experiencing nowadays. The following extract shows her point of view.

1: “I was a student at Cultura a long time ago, so I know how different they are. I don’t know how they are working nowadays, but back in the day, it was very school-like, we used to sit down and the teacher spoke Portuguese all the time, we learned grammar, there was an immense gap between the teacher and the student. I don’t know about it today, though. We used to call the teacher ‘Mrs. Guerra’, who was a very old lady, and ‘very British’. It was very traditional.”

In contrast to what she experienced in the past, her recent years at the present course is quite different, even though the methodology adopted and used by the course is known for being teacher-centered. She goes on sharing her experience when further asked about how it facilitates for adult learners.

2: “I think the methodology enhances conversation skills. However, when it comes to my age, I’m not so sure. There are some issues. In my case, I have already learned English, I’m here just to keep updated. My group consists of interested students, and you conduct the classes very well. When they start ‘digressing’, you bring them back to the topic. Although I’m among teenagers, I try to focus on my own learning. I don’t care much for the fact that they’re younger, even if they are interested.”

The extract above shows how she is aware of what is going on around her. Although I had to translate it, something that called my attention in this part is the fact that she distances herself from the other students by using the third person plural pronoun ‘they’ in her speech. I believe that she regards herself as more experienced than the others, and standing above them, even as far as language skills go, once she considers that she already knows the language.

When I move on to the topic of different ages inside the same group, she affirms that it is not an issue for her, and that she does not feel uncomfortable among adolescents, as did Bete, who confessed she felt like a fish out of water sometimes. For Susana, it does not affect her performance during class or out of it. Once her focus is on her own learning, she states that does not feel inhibited, or too ashamed, to make mistakes, for example.

3: "I feel indifferent about it. I focus on what I want here. But they are interested too. If they were a bunch of uninterested students whom you have to pull by the ears, maybe I wouldn't feel so comfortable. But that's not the case."

The question about the so-called hindrance that adults face while learning a language in comparison to children or teenagers clarifies Susana's opinion about it. Personally speaking, I gather that her education in Pedagogy makes a big difference here. The fact that the other interviewee had little, or no, notion of the many issues behind the learning or acquisition process provided me with a rather static point of view on the research topic, that is, evidence towards the idea that children are faster and better learners. The following extract shows Susana's opposing viewpoint of the subject.

4: "I don't think so. The fact that they're younger does not make them more apt to learn. Even though sometimes they have more contact with the language through games, music, etc, they are not interested in learning. I believe it's like putting two and two together: the age and the interest."

What her opinion has in common with Bete's is the part where she mentions how teenagers have more availability to get in contact with the language. Both Susana and Bete believe that things may be easier for them because of it. Nonetheless, Susana argues that this the only advantage adolescents have, while Bete affirms that their younger counterparts have more chances to

experience the language and fewer setbacks in their learning process, such as a fresher memory. As the interview goes on, I asked her if she feels inhibited in class, and she said no. Moreover, she argues that there is a great exchange among them.

5: "I feel extremely comfortable. I don't feel inhibited at all. There's an exchange: some things I know quite well and I teach them, or give them tips; on the other hand, there are things they know more about than I do. Things that have to do with music, TV, the latest gossip...their universe. They share with me."

Again, the use of the third person plural, which may corroborate to the fact that she is aware of the age gap between them and to her being more experienced, thus, distancing a little from them. I myself believe that what originates this distance is the fact that she is taking the course in order only to practice her skills, while the others are there to learn things for the first time. When I asked her how she would feel in an adult-only group, and if she would like to be in one, she maintains her opinion.

6: "I'm indifferent. However, I wouldn't like to be in a group like that in which there's no exchange. I think that being interested is very important."

As this section closes, I asked her opinion on the teacher's role in age-mixed groups and whether they should worry about it. She answers that it does not depend on the teacher's learned skills, but something that 'some of them' have, which she calls 'mando de sala'. I cannot explain what she actually meant by it, but a big question came to my mind: is it related to my being an authoritative teacher like those in old times, who had complete command of the class? Here is what she said:

7: “Not really. It’s about something that teachers have...some of them. It’s called ‘mando de sala’. It’s something very old, but the teacher is the center and who sees all. If the teacher doesn’t have it, it’s bad. Then, the age issue becomes secondary.”

Despite her rather traditional opinion of the role of the teacher in class, that is, the teacher as the center, or the one who is there only to transmit knowledge, she mentions that we are also the ones who see everything. Based on that, I assume that she sees the teacher as the figure responsible for both instructing the students, no matter how, and solving problems that may arise along the way.

Following the pattern of Bete’s interview, the third and fourth sections have to do with motivation and learning a language in a globalized world, respectively. Their opinions are quite similar, even when they mention that they interact with other family members who also study English.

8: “When I was younger, I had to do it, because my parents ordered. Today I study because I like languages, and also to keep updated. I study because I want to.”

9: “I talk to my nieces, especially with Raquel, who is more fluent. But it’s just talking.”

As far as my research topic goes, my final conclusion is that Susana is clearly different from Bete. While the latter believes that different ages in the same classroom affect the learning process, and that it influenced her negatively and made her feel uncomfortable, the former argues that age is not such a relevant matter, on the condition that the group itself make her feel comfortable. What may distort, or change, the relevance of Susana’s point of view on the subject is the fact that she is not a real beginner, or even a ‘real learner’, once she herself affirms that she already speaks the language.

v.iii) ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS

As it has been previously mentioned in the section entitled A FOREWORD ON ANDRAGOGY in the initial part of this paper, the traditional form of instruction called Pedagogy is a model intended for the teaching of children, which has been applied to the teaching of adults as well, once nowadays more and more mature people have showed interest in studying, or, as is the case of my study, learning a second language. Based on the discrepancies found between children and adults while learning, such as motivation and independence, a second form of instruction was thought of by researcher Malcom Knowles in the 70's to cater to adult learners, and thus, named Andragogy (it is valid to remember here that both forms are not supposed to be seen as opposites or dichotomous, but rather as two ends along the line of the learning process which should complement each other to a certain extent). As is the case of Pedagogy, its younger sister comprehends a set of principles, or assumptions, which may account for different student's profiles, and should not be applied exclusively to adult learners. Briefly, they are: 1) adult learners are self-directed, which means that they are more independent and may display some resistance once they feel something is being imposed on them; 2) adult learners bring their life experiences to the classroom, something that can be used as a foundation for learning; 3) adult learners are goal-oriented, meaning that they need to associate what they learn with the social roles they are expected to perform, and 4) adult learners are more problem-centered, and need to feel that what they are learning is applicable to their everyday life, rather than gathering knowledge for further use (KNOWLES, 1970). Additionally, Knowles includes two more assumptions in the second edition of his book, ten years later. They are: 5) adult learners are

internally motivated to learn, for many different reasons which vary from self-esteem to desire to accomplish a goal, and 6) adult learners need to know why they are learning something because they are fully responsible for managing their own lives (KNOWLES, 1980). Although Knowles had adults in mind when developing his theory, it is valid to remember that some andragogical elements also reflect children behavior while learning.

In this present section I aim at drawing an analysis of the interviews I conducted with my two students through the lenses of Andragogy, looking at the principles mentioned in the paragraph above and trying to find andragogical elements in what the interviewees shared. I decided not to include extracts here because I intended to draw a more theoretical analysis, and also because this has already been done in the two previous sub-sections. Furthermore, I also aim at seeing if these principles can be found, or even applied to the setting I chose to investigate, that is, adult learners among teenagers in a second language classroom, or maybe if there is, or not, an impairment for adults. Before starting, though, I wish to state that Andragogy and its principles were not created, or developed, solely to cater to ELT. Therefore, some of the elements or assumptions may sound somehow unclear at first looks, and based on the data collected I tried to unveil and expose them here.

Both interviewees showed no hesitation in sharing their views; however, I stumbled upon two opposing ideas on the topic of my investigation. Even though the students have different backgrounds in terms of level of fluency and goals, what they have in common is the fact that both of them used to be EFL students in their teenage years and have recently decided to re-start. Hence, I tried to get from them whatever they had to say about the classroom setting they were

immersed in. The first difference, and I guess, the most relevant one, is that Bete felt misplaced most of the time, while Susana felt rather comfortable among her younger counterparts. Although Bete argued she gets along quite well with her daughters and young family members, she would rather study with adults only. This did not seem to be an issue for Susana, though. In the following paragraphs, I am going to highlight their views based on the six principles of Andragogy I cited above.

As far as the first principle goes (adult learners move from dependency to independency or self-directedness), being self-directed somehow means that you are free to take actions and to object to certain requirements, a trait which is characteristic of adult behavior. Nevertheless, neither of the interviewees mentions the feeling of being imposed or ordered to do something they would rather not do while in class. Although the methodology used by the course is heavily based on the prompts the teacher gives the students, such as telling them what to ask their peers during practically the whole class, both of them did not seem to realize the fact that there is some kind of imposition going on. As a beginner student, Bete had few opportunities to express herself more freely, once the methodology requires that the teacher conduct the conversations and interfere quite vehemently, either to correct mistakes or to control time, for example. On the contrary, the fact that Susana is not a beginner and displays more fluency in the target language, accounts for her being more able to carry a conversation more independently, and more naturally. However, it does not mean that even in her case the teacher will not interfere, if need be. These issues seem to pass unnoticed to all students, and I believe that even though there is more room for discussion and development in terms of learning theories nowadays, many people

still seem to be unaware of how much can be exchanged inside the classroom, even if the methodology adopted tries to hinder it.

As to the second principle (adults carry a reservoir of experiences that can be used as a foundation on which to build learning), I found little evidence in their answers. Bete does not refer to many situations that she experienced and that relate to her being a student. Nevertheless, she talks about the opposite, that is, experiences she had while traveling, for example, in which she listened to other people speaking the language and her being able to identify, or recognize, words and structures learned previously. Such a fact illustrates the second principle found in her interview, once she was able to apply the English she learned in a situation outside the classroom. In addition, it may serve as a motivation booster for adults, and has a lot to do with the fourth principle, which suggests that adults need to feel that what they are learning is applicable to their lives. Unlike Bete, Susana did not mention any situations which she experienced that relate to the learning of English itself. Though the second principle argues that adult learners bring their life experiences to the classroom, I strongly believe that both Bete and Susana did not realize the difference that exists between learning in the classroom and the amount of learning they gathered in life, that is, their life experience, which is bigger than that of their younger classmates and which might influence their performance in class.

Conversely, the third principle (adults associate what they learn with the social roles they are expected to perform) is more evident in both interviews. Bete says that most courses tend to neglect the fact that more adults are inside their classrooms and, thus, do not bother to implement or adapt their methodologies to mature learners (the situations, materials and activities are often

child-like). This made her feel misplaced at times in both courses she chose to study at. Additionally, she contends that adolescents are more apt to learn because they are more available to face situations which may require using what they learn in the classroom, as well as the fact they are constantly in contact with videos, music and movies, which, she argues, is not the case for most adults. She complements by stating that her younger classmates have fewer life obligations to see to in their everyday routines. Susana makes it clear in the interview that she is an advanced student and that she studies English at the moment in order to keep updated (there are some other students in other groups of mine who do the same; they seem to be aware of the fact that fluency tends to wither if they do not keep themselves in contact with the language, and as I said before, attending a course is the only option for them). Besides that, she is fully aware of what she wants as a foreign language student and enjoys the experience. Nevertheless, she somehow distances herself from the group when she makes use of 'they' or 'them' to refer to her classmates, which indicates her self-consciousness as an older member of the group who plays a different role in the setting.

The notion brought forward by the fourth principle (adults need to feel that what they are learning is applicable to immediate situations in everyday life) is, to me, the most relevant one. In other words, the usefulness of what is taught should be prioritized. This can be clearly observed in Bete's interview when she argues that more emphasis should be given to speaking skills, which, for her, are the most difficult to achieve. The importance she rests on them reflects something I read on a paper by Diller (1981), who affirms that different brain cells are associated with different skills. He claims that pyramidal cells are responsible for phonetic/phonological acquisition and they are developed by age 6/8, whereas stellate cells, which he links with

semantics and syntax, reach maturation points over two to three decades of age. If his claim could be confirmed, more should be done for adults in terms of pronunciation and phonetics, and Bete's point would certainly serve as evidence in favor of it. As previously said, she points out that she was able to understand pieces of conversations she had been exposed to out of the classroom, which made her realize that she was really learning a foreign language from scratch. Another noteworthy aspect that somehow relates to this principle is her dissatisfaction with previous courses, something which caused her to quit. In other words, she argues that she did not feel as if she was really learning to speak English in other courses she attended. Nevertheless, such arguments were not found in Susana's interview, though it is clear from her interview that she has at least an idea of different teaching methodologies, especially when she describes the classes she used to attend in her adolescence, in which the focus was grammar and the language spoken in class was Portuguese (and it is a well-known fact that it was one of the few methodologies available in ELT around thirty years ago). Although she does not mention any situations in which she could apply what she is exposed to in class, the relation between her experience as a language student corroborates the point she makes when she affirms that learning is always useful for all ages, an aspect also found in Bete's interview.

The fifth principle (adults are internally motivated to learn, for reasons which vary from self-esteem to desire to accomplish a goal) approaches the issue of motivation, a very rich one, and, at present, a topic of heated debate in the field of ELT. It seems to me that many new theories have been put forward based on it, and as far as adult learning goes, it plays a vital role in their learning process. Along with the usefulness I discussed in the paragraph above, motivation originates from numerous sources. In the interviews I conducted with Bete and Susana, I found

different reasons for taking up a language course. What Bete points out as the first reason for her starting studying again was a personal decision based on the necessity of learning a second language in today's globalized world, especially when it comes to making professional connections. Thus, her motivation is based on a tripod of reasons: a personal decision, the importance of English in a globalized world and the prospect of professional achievements. Moreover, she argues that unlike many adolescents, adults decide to learn because they really need to, and not just to spend free time. Similarly, Susana affirms that her group consists of teenagers who are interested in learning, which contributes to her motivation. Additionally, she states that she is fond of languages and feels comfortable as a student; but unlike Bete, her decision to study English has nothing to do with her professional career.

As it was said in the fourth paragraph of this analysis which discusses the notion of self-directedness, the last principle (adults need to know why they are learning something because they are fully responsible for managing their own lives) is related to the independence most adult learners display in taking actions and being responsible for themselves. In the data analyzed, I found some evidence that support these two principles. Bete argues that she quit other courses because she felt that important skills, such as speaking, were not well approached by the methodology adopted. When she started studying as an adult, she realized how the 'new' course focused on speaking, which, according to her, is the most important part when it comes to learning a foreign language. Additionally, she believes that courses in general should pay more attention to different ages in the same class. All of these arguments she makes support the principle of independence, indicating that she herself makes the decisions based on her own will and beliefs. Susana, on the other hand, comments neither on the importance of speaking skills

nor on how courses should worry about age difference, and she reinforces the fact that she feels at ease among teenagers and even tries to profit from it and share experiences and knowledge with her younger classmates.

VI. CONCLUSION

When I first settled on the research topic of a potential influence that age difference might have on adult students' foreign language learning process, somehow I knew there would not be a definite conclusion to be reached, as is the case of many studies I read in order to prepare for this paper. However, my main goal was not to find a solution or to clarify thoughts on the subject. As stated in the introduction, my intention was to describe and analyze the issue of age difference in the foreign language classroom and if it influenced the older students' learning process. The two students I interviewed fit the profile I investigated and they display all the characteristics of adult learning discussed in the previous section. Nonetheless, I chose not to approach how they may affect the students' learning of English, and therefore, cannot say whether they play a part in the classroom setting and activities. Once again, I aimed at getting from them whatever they had to share about my research topic.

The methodology I selected to use in this study, widely known as Grounded Theory (GT), is based on the idea that, first, researchers need to collect data and then, try to develop a theory. This was exactly what I did. Nonetheless, I have not been able to theorize about the subject yet, and I am not sure if one day I will. Furthermore, my point of view as an English language teacher, who teaches age-heterogeneous groups, on the existence of a critical period (CP) is that some researchers have a very inappropriate viewpoint towards it, claiming that adults will never attain fluency in the target language. I believe that it all depends on how much effort is designated for learning. Acquiring linguistic proficiency is definitely a tough task for some, even for adolescents, but it should not represent an obstacle for those who intend to learn a foreign

language. The issues that hinder students from pursuing their studies are many, as well, and these are the ones who can really cause trouble, I believe. As it was pointed out by both interviewees, adults are supposed to deal with a wide assortment of daily obligations that may distance them from their goals, whereas their younger mates have little to worry about and it, consequently, could facilitate the process. This can be clearly seen when we look at adult learning through the lenses of Andragogy.

Although its principles were divided into six different categories, it is important to state that not only do all of them complement one another, but they may also reflect adults' and children's behavior simultaneously as far as learning is concerned, an observation I made in the chapter entitled A FOREWORD ON ANDRAGOGY. Moreover, another noteworthy observation to be made is that Andragogy was not thought of for the issues behind the teaching of English as Foreign Language (EFL) only, as it can be applied to the teaching of adults in general. Nevertheless, I found it would serve its purpose in providing me with a theoretical framework through which I could guide this monograph. The results obtained after analyzing the interviews were predictable because I know the students profiles and have always been able to identify their greater difficulties in my classes. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to expose such contrasting views on this matter. I also hope I can shed some light on such a topic, which has so very little in terms of academic discussion and hypotheses, but which is very common in many English courses. Finally, I intend to continue this piece of research and help other teachers in this field who may have already had asked themselves the same question I did.

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VIII. APPENDICES

Interview questions:

Section 1 (Personal background):

- 1) Qual seu nome?
- 2) Quantos anos você tem ?
- 3) Qual sua profissão? Qual a sua área de trabalho? Em que área você atua?
- 4) Fale um pouco sobre sua família.

Section 2 (Focus on the research topic):

- 1) Quanto tempo você estudou/ Há quanto tempo você estuda no BRASAS?
- 2) Qual a sua opinião sobre a metodologia? Você acha que ela facilita o aprendizado para alunos da sua idade?
- 3) Qual sua opinião sobre diferentes idades dentro da mesma sala de aula? Isso te incomodava/incomoda?
- 4) Você acha que crianças e adolescentes aprendem mais facilmente? E adultos?
- 5) Como você se sentia/sente dentro da sala de aula com colegas mais jovens que você? Você se sentia/sente inibida ou com vergonha de cometer erros?
- 6) Você se sentiria mais confortável em uma turma somente com alunos adultos?
- 7) Você acha que adulto aprende com a mesma rapidez que adolescentes?
- 8) Numa escala de 1 a 5, onde 5 seria o nível máximo, quanto você acredita que o português interfere no aprendizado do inglês?
- 9) Na sua opinião, qual o papel do professor que ensina alunos de idades diferentes? Você acha que ele deve se preocupar com esse fator, ou deve ensinar independente disso?

Section 3 (Motivational issues):

- 1) O que te motivou a aprender inglês? Foi uma decisão de cunho pessoal ou profissional?
- 2) Existia alguma forma de obrigação em aprender a língua ou você quis aprender por decisão própria?
- 3) Você tem familiares e/ou amigos que também estudam/falam inglês?

Section 4 (Learning English and the globalized world):

- 1) Como foi pra você aprender uma segunda língua? Quando você entrou no primeiro momento, na sala de aula, o que você sentiu, em termos de realização, vamos dizer?
- 2) Você acha que aprender uma língua é importante para a saúde mental?
- 3) Você acha importante aprender uma segunda língua num mundo globalizado?
- 4) Você usa inglês no seu dia-a-dia? Se não, por quê? Se sim, como?

Extracts from Bete's interview:

1: “Eu acho que os cursos em geral acabam focando um pouco mais pra ‘ala’ jovem, acho que por causa do mercado de trabalho, mas assim, tem várias pessoas de meia idade ou mais velhos que gostariam de fazer inglês, estudar...e quando você que a importância é a parte oral e você não vê um curso muito direcionado pra isso, vê uma metodologia assim um pouco mais infantil, um pouco mais pra adolescente, você acaba se sentindo [...] meio um peixinho fora d’água.”

2: “Seria legal. Seria legal. Que acho que você vai realmente ver que é, assim, uma dificuldade que tem dessa idade, que eu acho, vou reforçar, que acho que os cursos deveriam ter uma preocupação maior em trabalhar mais a oral, que é muito cobrada. [A parte que] o mercado exige mais e que o adulto não tem muito tempo pra ouvir uma música, ver um vídeo... Ele não tem muito tempo pra isso, entendeu, então acho que ele fica, vamos dizer, em desvantagem do jovem nessa relação.”

3: “Ah com certeza. Com certeza. Eles têm...eles são descontaminados, né, a gente tá contaminado pela vida, pelas coisas pra fazer, pelo dia-a-dia, pelas tarefas, que são inúmeras, quer dizer, eles têm mais essa facilidade, de assimilar alguma coisa. A idade a favor também, né.”

4: “Não, com certeza que não. Até pela idade, né, pela... inúmeras coisas que você tem que fazer da sua vida, tarefas e preocupações, etc. e a memória também que já, acho que já não ajuda. A memória deles é super... fresquinha, né, tranquila [risos].”

5: “Eu acho que o papel do professor é ter flexibilidade ali em trabalhar as idades, que são diferentes, entendeu? Até encaixar pessoas ali no grupo, né, tanto os mais novos com os mais velhos e os mais velhos com os mais novos. Tem que ter uma...um trabalho ali de...interagir assim no grupo bem, dar uma atenção mais especial, mas assim...isso também prejudicaria os mais novos. Eles vão se sentir ‘poxa, to sendo tratado diferente’. Acho que essa separação das turmas...fazer turmas de adolescentes, de mais velhos, não é uma discriminação, e sim uma atenção especial. Uma dificuldade maior que a meia idade passa a ter, entendeu, em relação a eles, né.”

6: “Não. Eu quis por vontade própria, que iria me ajudar realmente no mercado de trabalho, entendeu?”

7: “Olha, eu gosto, acho importante no mercado de trabalho. Acho bacana pra caramba você ouvir alguém falando inglês com fluência, entendeu, e isso pro mercado de trabalho é muito importante, entendeu?”

8: “Engraçado é que no BRASAS, as vezes eu vou a algum lugar eu vejo alguém falando, aí eu entendo mesmo que eu tenha ficado pouco tempo, entendeu? Mas isso eu acho bacana, entendeu?”

9: “É claro que a cobrança da nota na prova oral pro adulto ela existe e tem que existir, mas assim, se fosse uma coisa assim não tão ligada a nota, uma coisa diferente, pro adulto aprender sem medo, entendeu? Você vai ali pra prova oral, você vai cheio de medo, aí tu fica bloqueado, mesmo que você saiba alguma coisa, você se bloqueia ali, entendeu, pelo nervosismo, por falar... achar que vai falar errado... Então acho que essa atenção especial, acho que pra mim, seria importante pra caramba.”

10: “Eu acho que aprender é sempre importante pra saúde mental, pra produção, né? [...] não é todo mundo que tem essa oportunidade, mas assim é muito interessante. Parece que você tá voltando a aprender a andar, a aprender a falar, entendeu? [risos] É uma coisa muito..., né? E você já teve uma vivência grande, aí você fica assim: ‘Caramba, tô aprendendo de novo, né, meio que be-a-bá, né, mas é um be-a-bá de uma língua diferente, né?’”

11: “Extremamente importante, principalmente o inglês. Acho que é muito importante, entendeu? Você tem... hoje em dia é tudo muito rápido, né, entendeu? O que acontece no Japão, você já tá sabendo aqui agora.”

Extracts from Susana's interview:

1: “Eu estudei na Cultura há muito tempo atrás, então eu sei como é diferente. Eu não sei como estão hoje, mas na minha época, era muito parecido com escola...a gente sentava e a professora falava português o tempo todo. A gente aprendia gramática só, tinha uma distância muito grande entre a gente e a professora. Mas não sei como tá hoje. A gente chamava ela de ‘Miss Guerra’, ela era uma senhorinha bem idosa já, ‘very British’. Era muito tradicional.”

2: “Eu acho que a metodologia facilita a conversação. Mas quanto à idade, não sei dizer. Existem alguns problemas. No meu caso, eu já aprendi inglês, e só tô estudando pra manter atualizada. A minha turma tem alunos bastante interessados, e você conduz as aulas muito bem. Quando eles começam a sair do controle, você consegue chama atenção. Apesar de eu estar entre adolescentes, eu tento focar em mim. Não me preocupo com fato deles serem mais novos, ou se estão interessados ou não.”

3: “Pra mim não faz diferença. Eu me preocupo com o meu objetivo. Mas eles também se interessam. Se fossem um monte de alunos que não querem nada, que você tem que ficar puxando pelas orelhas, acho que eu não me sentiria tão à vontade. Mas não é o caso.”

4: “Acho que não. O fato deles serem mais jovens não quer dizer que aprendem mais fácil. Mesmo eles tendo mais contato com a língua através de vídeos, música, às vezes eles não se interessam. Acho que é uma questão de dois mais dois: a idade e o interesse.”

5: “Eu me sinto muito bem. Não me sinto nem um pouco inibida. Mas também tem uma troca: eu sei algumas que acabo ensinando a eles, ou dou dicas, e eles por outro lado, sabem mais de outras coisas do que eu, coisas do tipo música, TV, os assuntos recentes...o mundo deles. Eles dividem comigo.”

6: “É indiferente pra mim. Mas também, eu não ia gostar de estar numa turma onde não houvesse essa troca. Acho que o interesse é tudo.”

7: “Acho que não. Isso tem a ver com uma coisa que professors tem...alguns. É o mando de sala. É algo muito velho isso, mas o professor é o centro da turma e vê tudo. Se ele não tem isso, fica ruim. Assim, o problema da idade fica em segundo plano.”

8: “Quando eu era mais nova, eu ia porque meus pais obrigavam. Mas hoje em dia eu gosto de línguas, e também pra me manter atualizada. Eu tô aqui porque quero.”