



Pós-Graduação Lato Sensu em Língua Inglesa

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**MINDFULNESS AND EXPLORATORY PRACTICE: A WAY OF BEING IN THE  
CLASSROOM**

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## ABSTRACT

In the past few years there has been an increased interest in the practice of Mindfulness in the classroom. This paper presents a research carried out with fourth and fifth graders in a private school in the State of Rio de Janeiro. The excessive noise in the classroom became a puzzle that motivated teacher and learners to work together to try to understand it. The practice of Mindfulness was introduced to the group due to an intrinsic desire to improve the quality of life in the classroom, to bring awareness to more attentive listening, and to try to focus attention on the present moment. Guided by the principles of Exploratory Practice, with the emphasis on understanding rather than on problem-solving, teacher and learners were able to reach some understandings through pedagogical activities and also to reflect upon their own classroom routine.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Exploratory Practice, teacher, learners, understanding

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## RESUMO

Nos últimos anos a prática de *Mindfulness* na sala de aula tem sido alvo de grande interesse. Esta pesquisa apresenta um trabalho desenvolvido com alunos cursando o quarto e quinto anos de uma escola particular no Estado do Rio de Janeiro. O barulho excessivo na sala de aula tornou-se uma questão instigante que motivou o grupo a trabalhar juntos. A prática de *Mindfulness* foi introduzida aos alunos devido a um desejo de melhorar a qualidade de vida na sala de aula, de trazer conscientização para uma escuta mais atenta e de focar a atenção no momento presente. Guiada pelos princípios da Prática Exploratória, que enfatiza a busca pelo entendimento ao invés da solução de problemas, professora e alunos, por meio de atividades pedagógicas, compreenderam e refletiram sobre a vivência em sala de aula.

Palavras-chave: *Mindfulness*, Prática Exploratória, professor, alunos, entendimento

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## INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness has become widely spread in the fields of psychology, medicine and education. Its popularity can be seen in many books (KABAR-ZINN, 2005, 2013a, 2014; JENNINGS, 2015) and articles (MEIKLEJOHN, 2012; SHAPIRO, 2005) published in the past decades. Mindfulness is basically the ability to be fully present and aware of where we are, what we are doing, and what is happening around us. The purpose is not to change who we are, instead, it is to recognize and cultivate the best of who we are at the present moment. Although each area praises the benefits of the practice for people's physical and mental health, this research paper aims at focusing on Mindfulness applied to the classroom environment. The motivation that inspired this research was an intrinsic desire to improve the quality of life in the classroom, which was the main reason for electing Exploratory Practice (ALWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009; GIEVE; MILLER, 2006) as a guideline.

To carry out the research, I observed students in the Bilingual Program in a class composed of seven 4<sup>th</sup> graders and six 5<sup>th</sup> graders. The school where this research was conducted opened in March 1969, in a city in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Only in 2002, a Bilingual Program was added to the schedule as an extra-curricular activity. In fact, the project began in 2001 when a colleague invited me to participate in a meeting with one of the directors of the school and the coordinator that would be in charge of the project. My colleague and I had worked at the same English Course for about 10 years, where we built our teaching experience with the audio-lingual method. We were asked to develop a project to teach English as close as possible to the school's Pedagogical Proposal which is based on three pillars – Knowledge, Values, and Culture.

It was agreed in the beginning that the Bilingual Program would be developed for the three years of Pre-school education and the five years of Elementary education. For the pilot group, I had seven students, ages 4 to 6 and my colleague also had seven students, ages 7 to 10. During the first year, we had two teachers working with us in order to give assistance during the classes and to help with the school methodology. Moving from a teacher-centered institution to a student-centered one was challenging. Working with preschoolers was even more challenging. Due to the assistance received, a lot of reading and studying, I overcame the initial difficulties and simply fell in love with my new job.

Along these 14 years, we have developed a curriculum for the Bilingual Program, based on the constructivist framework. The basic curriculum has been continuously updated and it fits into the school's Pedagogical Proposal. Every year, the coordinators choose one theme that is expected to inspire all teachers when planning the lessons and to provide interaction among all students. Therefore, the annual theme guides and unifies all the segments from Pre-school to High School, Bilingual Program included.

The families have two options when they decide to enroll their children in the Bilingual Program, it can be either morning or afternoon. In both options, students spend seven hours at school and lunch is considered part of the Bilingual Program. The students mentioned in this research have their regular Portuguese classes in the morning. At midday, they have lunch at the cafeteria and that is when the English classes begin. The teachers and the nutritionist help them to select what they are going to eat speaking English. After lunch, which takes about 20 minutes, the students walk to the classroom where the English classes take place. They have a 25-minute break for personal hygiene and playtime that can be in the classroom or outside. Some students choose to play with puzzles, building blocks while most of

them prefer to play outside the classroom, where they usually jump rope, play tag, hide and seek, soccer and other ball games. At around 12:45, we start our activities based on the development of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills in English.

If I had to choose a word to describe this group (seven 4<sup>th</sup> graders and six 5<sup>th</sup> graders), I would choose 'noisy'. When the students were in the classroom, any person from outside would say they were not having a class or even think that the teacher was not there. While one was talking to the peer sitting next to him/her, another student was singing, and others shouted to get my attention. They were loud in the classroom and in the cafeteria. It took me a while to understand that they played safely outside the classroom despite the shouting and screaming.

Some students complained while others begged for extra minutes to play freely. It always took them a while to settle down. They were noisy and restless up to the end of the class. Every time I talked to them about the importance of being quiet during the activities, they seemed to understand, but only for two or three minutes, then all the noise and confusion started again. As a teacher and educator, I tried to figure out why it was difficult for them to speak in a low voice while working in pairs or in small groups, or to be quiet while another person was talking. I tried to blame their extended schedule, the tests they had in the morning, the heat or the rain, in short, I searched for external reasons first. Consequently, I ended up preparing more and more exercises and activities to keep them busy. I reminded them of the rules to be followed in the classroom by writing them on the whiteboard every day. What puzzled me was the fact that in this chaotic situation the learners were involved in their activities, accomplished their tasks with care and showed good results in spite of all the noise in the classroom.

The fact of the matter was that I had a group of very good young learners already reading and writing in English, shouting in Portuguese and, in my view,

unable to listen to me and to each other. At that time, I was studying about the benefits of practicing Mindfulness at school in the United States and I thought my students would benefit from the practice. So, I introduced the practice I was learning in our classroom routine and had the following question: Why should my students and I practice Mindfulness in the classroom?

This paper is organized into four sections. The first chapter contains the definition of Mindfulness and the importance of mindful teaching for the interaction between teacher and learners. The second chapter explores what Exploratory Practice and Mindfulness have in common in order to understand and focus on quality of life in the classroom. The third chapter presents the Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activity (PEPA) done in the classroom. The fourth shows the analysis and discussion about my own understanding of classroom life. I intend, therefore, to try to understand what puzzles me in the classroom and at the same time work to focus on the quality of life in my teaching and learning environment.

## METHODOLOGY

This research aims at answering the following research question: **Why should my students and I practice Mindfulness in the classroom?** In order to reach this goal, I chose the participatory paradigm as a guide (Guba; Lincoln, 2009), which involves the three processes of practitioner development, Reflexive research, Action Research, and Exploratory Practice. As I progressed in the course, I realized that, among the three processes, Exploratory Practice adjusted to the kind of research I wanted to carry out since I could integrate the research into the pedagogical program. Allwright (2001a, p. 120) explains that Exploratory Practice focuses on “collecting data on what happens in the classroom” and “taking action for understanding”. The learners’ production was gathered by monitoring life in the classroom and by working with two questions as Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs): Why are we noisy in the classroom? and What can we do to stop being noisy in the classroom?

Basically, this research follows the Four Steps that Allwright (2004, p. 3-4) indicates as a guide.

1) The Puzzle: Identify a puzzle area. Refine your thinking about the puzzle area. Select a particular topic to focus on.

My puzzle area was the way the learners behaved at school. Narrowing down, I wanted to understand why they were noisy, shouting, singing and whistling in the classroom while doing activities. I decided to focus on how the practice of Mindfulness that I introduced would improve our interaction and help them focus on the present moment.

2) The Method: Find appropriate classroom procedures to explore the puzzle. Adapt the classroom procedure to the puzzle you want to explore. Use the procedure in class ('data collection').

I started monitoring the learners by taking written and mental notes. In my observations, I tried to pay attention to the way they interacted with me and with each other, and how they behaved in various situations during the school routine. I kept a diary for the Mindfulness practice in which I took notes of my observations and the learners' exchanges before, during and after the practice. Two activities (PEPAs) were used to generate material on different occasions.

3) Reflection and Interpretation: Interpret the outcomes.

The activities (PEPAs) were part of the pedagogical procedures that the learners and I were used to doing. In other words, we did not have to engage in any different activity to fulfill the needs to work for understanding. All activities were part of the classroom routine we were familiar with. Monitoring the learners brought me the awareness I needed to try to understand my puzzle. I could reflect upon the findings as a way to try to understand the learners and my own practice as a teacher. It seems clear to me that the learners' writings and drawings mean what we did at that specific moment in our classroom life.

4) Implications: Decide on implications and plan accordingly.

I understand that the learners' involvement in the process of trying to understand classroom life appears to be the best way to develop their sense of responsibility towards their own learning and attitudes. Working together is a way to construct or co-construct our understandings of the world and, perhaps, even more important, our understandings of ourselves as human beings.

## MINDFUL TEACHING

The first time I heard the term “Mindfulness” and its definition was during an online course I have taken at the University of California Berkeley whose instructors were Dacher Keltner and Emiliana Simon-Thomas. The course is called The Science of Happiness (EdX Berkeley, 2014), and Mindfulness is one of the topics of the course, along with Happiness, Compassion, Gratitude, Cooperation, and Reconciliation. Since then, I have been reading articles and books about the subject besides trying to apply it to my daily routine as well as my professional life.

*The Mindful Revolution: the science of finding focus in a stress-out, multitasking culture* was the headline on the cover of Time Magazine (PICKERT, 2014). The article claims that mindfulness is not simply a fad; it has a scientific basis, which appeals to many people regardless of their religious background or professional training. It also remarks why an increasing number of universities, schools, hospitals, clinics and companies in the United States are integrating Mindfulness into their routines. The “ultimate goal is simply to give your attention fully to what you are doing. One can work mindfully and learn mindfully. One can exercise and even eat mindfully”, states the author of the article.

The same article (2014) refers to Jon Kabat-Zinn as “the father of MBSR” (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction). He was at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the early 70’s when he attended a lecture about meditation on the University campus. In 1979, he had already earned his Ph.D. in Molecular Biology and worked at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center as a teacher of anatomy and cell biology. It was then that he founded a program based on mindfulness meditation, called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (KABAT ZINN, 2011b). It is an eight-week course that helps patients cope with anxiety, stress, pain,

and illness by using mindfulness meditation. He is the author of many scientific articles and books on Mindfulness and he is also considered to be responsible for bringing Mindfulness to the mainstream of medicine. He has been defining Mindfulness as “the awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally”. Another definition (KABAT-ZINN, 2005, p. 108) suggests that “mindfulness can be thought of as moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as non-judgmentally, and as openheartedly as possible.” Therefore, the keywords to understand what mindfulness means are awareness, attention, and intention.

Kabat-Zinn (2007) believes that “awareness is boundless and infinitely available in every moment, no matter what you are doing”. The problem is that we are not taught to have this kind of awareness. We tend to live our lives without even being aware of our breath, of the sensations in our body, of our feelings and emotions. Most of the times, we are not fully aware of what we do at school, at work, at home, on a trip, in the streets. Kabat-Zinn (2013b) states that throughout our lives, “we have tremendous training in thinking, but no education in awareness” and that explains how hard it seems to bring and sustain our awareness to the present moment.

Paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment is not as simple as it seems because our minds tend to be everywhere except here and now. Sometimes, ruminating the past, other times, planning the future. Kabat-Zinn (2013a, p. 8) points out that mind wandering is a common experience and

[...] we may be only partially aware of what is actually occurring in the present. We can miss many of our moments because we are not fully here for them [...] We may find that much of the time we are really on automatic

pilot, functioning mechanically without being fully aware of what we are doing or experiencing.

The tendency of getting automatically involved in our own routines and wandering meaninglessly makes us miss important moments, unique moments in our lives. Kabat-Zinn (2005) invites the readers to inhabit their bodies by simply being present and aware of what is happening here and now. In his belief, “attention has to be maintained and nourished by intention” and practicing Mindfulness may help. To a certain extent, focusing attention on the present moment requires motivation, determination and willingness.

Kabat-Zinn’s view is shared by Shapiro (2009, 2014a) who defines Mindfulness as “the awareness that arises out of intentionally paying attention in an open, kind and discerning way”. The researcher (2005, 2014b) also mentions that there are three core elements to Mindfulness – Intention, Attention, and Attitude (IAA). These are not “separate processes or stages – they are interwoven aspects of a single cyclic process and occur simultaneously” (2005, p 375). Intention refers to why we do what we do; attention is related to our present moment awareness; and attitude indicates how we pay attention to the present moment. Shapiro (2005) claims that IAA are the fundamental components of Mindfulness.

The seven pillars or attitudes of Mindfulness practice suggested by Kabat-Zinn (2013a, p. 21-30) are “non-judging”, “patience”, “beginner’s mind”, “trust”, “non-striving”, “acceptance”, and “letting go”. And I understand the seven attitudes as follows:

- 1) Non-judging - be able to see what is happening with discernment and clarity;

- 2) Patience - understand and accept that sometimes things must unfold in their own way and in their own time;
- 3) Beginner's mind - see everything as if for the first time;
- 4) Trust - trust yourself and your basic wisdom and goodness;
- 5) Non-striving - let the things be what they are with the unfolding of life;
- 6) Acceptance - accept things as they actually are in the present;
- 7) Letting go - accept things as they are and let go judging thoughts;

In a series of videos entitled *9 Attitudes of Mindfulness* available on the internet, Kabat-Zinn (2013b) adds two other attitudes and clarifies that they are all completely interconnected and embedded in one another:

- 8) Gratitude - bring gratitude to our present moment;
- 9) Generosity - give joy to others and demonstrate you care.

In essence, Mindfulness is also connected to empathy, forgiveness, kindness, openness, and compassion (SHAPIRO, 2014a; KABAT-ZINN, 2013a, p. 31). All the pillars or attitudes are relevant to everybody's life; however, they all may be applicable to life in the classroom. Since Mindfulness is about personal well-being and the well-being of others, it can become part of teachers' and learners' daily practices. There are different ways of practicing Mindfulness at school. Even when the school does not have a specific program in the curriculum, the teacher may include the practice in the classroom routine. Meiklejohn (2012, p. 2) explains that

As a discipline, mindfulness can be integrated into the classroom using one of three basic approaches: indirect (teacher develops a personal mindfulness practice and embodies mindfulness attitudes and behaviors

throughout the school day); direct (programs teach the students mindfulness exercises and skills); or a combination of direct and indirect approaches.

By being aware of the three approaches, the teacher may decide what best suits the school's proposal and the learners' needs. Even when the intentional formal practice (direct approach) is not possible in the classroom for any reason, there is always the choice of including moments of Mindfulness in the teacher-student interaction (indirect approach). The practice may equip the students with a tool that can be used throughout their personal and professional lives. Integrating Mindfulness in classroom life requires a lot of self-discipline, personal determination and intention to bring awareness to experiences as teachers or learners.

Mindfulness is, in essence, a way of living and dealing with day-to-day problems. It is hard work and it means "getting to know ourselves inwardly and working at the interface where our lives meet the lives of our children" (KABAT-ZINN, 2014, p. 4). Even though the close relationship teacher-student usually lasts for a school year, it involves getting to know each other through daily interaction. As the adult in the relationship, the teacher should be responsible for making the time spent together a meaningful and special event in the students' lives.

Students bring into school their experiences they have in other social groups. They are members of families, which have unique eating habits, traditions, beliefs, religions, and cultural backgrounds. The relationship they have with parents, caregivers and other family members has great influence on their behavior in the classroom, their learning competence, their ability to engage in relationships with peers and teachers. On this subject, Robson (1995) is mentioned by Baker (2010) when he states that what the students "bring to the classroom in terms of previous learning is a crucial starting point for the teacher. A student's reservoir of knowledge,

understanding, and experience can provide a meaningful context on which the teacher can build” (ROBSON, 1995, apud BAKER, 2010, p. 180) and establish the guidelines for the students’ development. Being aware of the social and cultural background of the learner might help the teacher to engage the learner in the context of the classroom. Schoeberlein (2009, p. 2) suggests that

School-based learning is complex, in part because teachers and students carry individual webs of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors into an interactive classroom environment. Learning is most effective when teachers initiate the process of weaving these varied webs together.

Weaving everybody’s webs together is one of the many jobs a teacher is responsible for. The classroom is a web of social relationships (CUNHA, 2003) where teacher and learners interact formal and informally. In this environment, even when the teachers are supportive, affectionate, attentive and nurturing it does not guarantee that the classroom will have a positive atmosphere all the time. Conflicts are part of human nature and they happen in the classroom with certain frequency. Teachers have to be prepared to manage conflicts impartially by helping learners resolve misunderstandings, disagreements, arguments, clashes, disputes over toys. But most of all, school teachers, as the adults in the relationship, are concerned with the learners’ feelings and emotions. But, at the same time, they have to deal with their own feelings and emotions. In this sense, in a metaphorical way, the classroom may be compared to a kaleidoscope or a mosaic in which teachers and learners share time together remaining distinct in their own unique aspects.

On the one hand, we have the school teachers who must plan and develop lessons, prepare tests, record grades, write reports, provide feedback to parents, organize classroom materials, supervise students’ learning process, establish a

productive environment for learning, manage students' conduct, take care of their professional development and, most of all, are expected to be calm, patient, and understanding. On the other hand, we have the students. Twenty to thirty unique individuals showing different learning abilities, demanding attention and understanding, requiring constant supervision, expecting love, respect, and kindness all the time. Baker (2010, p. 292) points out that "schools and classrooms are highly complex organizations. They are sites where a multitude of actions and reactions, inputs and processes, variable and changing environments, and differing local and regional expected learning outcomes." These complex organizations are dynamic social networks where interactions, relationships, and experiences are part of an even larger system.

The ambiance in the classroom should provide comfort and safety for learners and teachers since they are enclosed in a room for a certain amount of time every day. And at least for a whole school year, during the working hours, teachers cannot leave the classroom, take a break, go for a walk, get some rest as they may wish sometimes. Neither can the students. For this reason, when teachers are able to make the classroom a pleasant and harmonious place, it may impact the students' attitudes and behavior. Learners need to have teachers physically and emotionally present in their lives. When they feel connected to the teacher, they can build a more meaningful relationship that facilitates their learning process. The connecting thread in the relationship between teacher and learner is affect. That is the reason why learners need to feel loved, accepted, sheltered and heard in the classroom. Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that it is through social interaction with a skillful tutor (parent, teacher, or more experienced peers) that important learning occurs. The tutor may model behaviors and/or offer verbal instructions to the child. Thus, children learn

through their interaction with the world and part of the learning process occurs in the classroom.

The classroom is the setting for intrapersonal (within the teacher and within the learner) and interpersonal (between teacher and learner, teacher and the group, among peers) experiences. These experiences are social interactions, but most of all they are emotional experiences. On this topic, Hargreaves (2005, p. 278, 279) asserts that

Emotions are at the heart of teaching. [...] Emotions are dynamic parts of ourselves, and whether they are positive or negative, all organizations, including schools, are full of them. Good teaching is charged with positive emotion. It isn't just a matter of knowing your subject, being efficient, having the correct competences, or learning all the right techniques. Good teachers aren't just well-oiled machines. Computers can never replace them. They are emotional, passionate beings who fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy.

The essence of Hargreaves' (2005) statement is that the emotional bonds teachers establish with the learners may be crucial for their intellectual development in the social and cultural environment. When teachers show enthusiasm about what they do, concern with the students' feelings, interest in their life experiences, and trust above all, the students may feel comfortable to deal with their own emotions in the classroom. When teachers are able to develop a closer look to the emotional well-being of the learners, they will have a better understanding of how the learners communicate their feelings and emotions through language, either verbal or non-verbal. Learning is a mix of social, cognitive and emotional experiences.

By trying to be fully present in classroom interactions, teachers communicate how much they care about the students' needs, thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

Again, the keywords awareness, attention, and intention play an important part in the cultivation of Mindfulness in the classroom. Teachers can scaffold the learners in the difficult task of listening. Attentive listening involves, to begin with, eye contact while someone is speaking. The act of making eye contact with the students ensures them how special they are at that single moment. Eye contact is an important component of interpersonal communication and should not be taken for granted when helping learners to become mindful listeners. Jennings (2015, p. 120, 121) suggests that

In order to respond with care, we need to be attentive, listen with an open mind, and be receptive to our students and their families so we can understand and empathize with their experience and recognize their needs. This involves bringing mindful awareness to the act of listening. The listening process helps us attune to another.

Mostly, Jennings (2015) draws attention to the fact that teachers should cultivate careful and attentive listening. On the same topic, Scharmer (2015) describes four levels of listening present in everybody's daily routine that can be applied to various situations, including classrooms. Level one (Downloading) refers to listening to what we already know to confirm our habitual judgments. Level two (Factual listening) refers to listening as paying attention to facts. It means listening with an open mind. Level three (Empathic) allows us to get connected with the experience of the others. It means listening with an open heart. Level four (Generative) refers to listening beyond personal experience, facts, and feelings. It means listening with an open will. Levels three and four are linked to the type of interaction that requires more empathy, compassion and kindness among speakers and listeners. Practicing the Empathic and Generative listening in the classroom may

motivate the development of a more meaningful relationship between learners and teachers.

When teachers practice mindful listening, they pay full attention and notice the internal and external dimensions of their experience in the classroom. Mindful listening means to listen for the understanding of how and why the learners are saying what they are saying at the moment they are saying it.

Another aspect considered important in the classroom environment is attention. Paying attention is expected to happen almost all the time in this setting. The ideal situation would be teachers paying close attention to learners in order to help their growth and development both cognitively and emotionally while learners focus their attention on activities, assignments, and tests. However, paying attention is not a simple task. Being physically present in the classroom may not mean that the learners are truly there. As Kabat-Zinn (2005, p. 80-81) implies “much of the time, it is only the child’s body that is in the classroom. The child’s gaze may be out of the window for long stretches, perhaps years at a time, seeing things that no one else is seeing”. The same applies to the teachers. Our bodies remain in the classroom while our thoughts are direct to other places. Although paying attention is a skill that can be taught and learned, it requires exercise and practice.

No matter how much pedagogical theory, or educational knowledge, or experience teachers have, if they do not know how to listen to the students, it is useless. All the theory is meaningless if the teacher is not fully paying attention to the learners. There can be no Education if the relationships are not authentic and meaningful. For that reason, the essence of the teaching-learning experience is to be present and connected. Mindfulness cultivates this interconnectedness that allows teacher and learners to create strong bonds and moments of interaction that can determine the quality of their time together.

The awareness that the teachers bring to the importance of listening may construct a more mindful classroom reality. Referring to a foreign language learning process, Kuschnir (2003, p. 47) believes that “the tripod of a language classroom is a mixture of social, cognitive and affective dimensions”. All these three aspects have to be considered in the educational context and teachers should be aware that the second language acquisition process is “strongly influenced by individual personality traits residing within the learner” (ARNOLD 1999, p. 8). Since some factors as anxiety, inhibition, motivation, self-esteem, extroversion, and introversion may influence the learning process, that is why language teachers should try to understand the learners’ emotional and affective reactions in order to help them cope with uncomfortable moments.

As a language teacher, I understood that practicing Mindfulness in the classroom was a mixture of attentive listening, eye-contact, focused attention, awareness of the present moment, trust, and kindness cultivation. And I believed that practicing mindfulness exercises might help learners and teachers pay more attention to their feelings and emotions and also cultivate an interpersonal relationship based on affection and respect. I was ready to integrate Mindfulness in my classroom because, first, I was convinced that it would help prevent some of the noise the students made in class. And second, I missed some hands-on practice. Coincidentally, it was then that the school librarian showed me a book in the shape of a deck of cards. The author, Buckley (2003), taught second grade in Los Angeles and used to start her classes with a yoga circle. Despite not being a Yoga teacher, I had almost seven years as a practitioner myself. And it seemed natural to teach something that was familiar to me. That is why I decided to involve the students in a new activity.

One day, when their time to play outside the classroom came to an end, I asked them to take off their shoes and socks and come inside. They were curious and excited, wondering what was going to happen. Then, using the deck of cards already mentioned, I showed the students each card saying the name of the yoga pose and they had to try to do one pose at a time. Consequently, the students learned the poses and their names in English - sunrise, sunset, dog, snake, rock, cat, cow, fish, legs up, butterfly, star, airplane, mountain, triangle, dancer, eagle, tree, gorilla, upside down gorilla, warrior, strong warrior. We practiced for many days until they were able to do the poses just listening to me, without even looking at the cards.

At this first beginning, the students were all noisy and restless. They got involved in the practice as if they were in a competition, trying to do it faster and finish before the others. They kept saying “*cabei*” (I’m done!) after each pose. It took them a while to understand that they had to focus and try to calm down. Each day, I tried a new sequence of poses, showing them the importance of breathing. What they seemed to enjoy the most was the fact that I asked them to take off shoes and socks before the exercises. The activity became part of the routine. The mindfulness practices happened on a daily basis for 15/20 minutes. Since the practice was conducted in English, the students understood that as another pedagogic activity.

Little by little, the students stopped saying *cabei* and behaved as if they understood the importance of slowing down for a moment, allowing themselves some time to calm down. I avoided the word meditation, instead, I used the word ‘imagination’ every time I invited them to close their eyes and relax. I started taking notes in my copybook, observing the students before, during and after the practice. Although we had some quiet moments during the ‘imagination time’, the students kept talking and shouting while working on an activity which could be writing, solving crossword puzzles, drawing, painting, working in pairs or in small groups and even

when I asked a student to read aloud, the rest of the group would be talking and shouting.

In a certain way, I may say the Mindfulness practice helped learners rest for some moments. For a short period of time, the students could quiet down and relax, which I considered healthy due to their extended schedule. However, during the rest of the class, they were loud, singing, whistling and shouting. At that point, I realized that I was part of the noise since when the students shouted I had to raise my tone of voice to be heard. That is when I learned that Exploratory Practice “starts out with an intention to try to understand, rather than change” (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p. 173) what seems to be a problem. So, I decided to work to understand why the students were noisy in the classroom.

## EXPLORATORY PRACTICE AND MINDFULNESS

Combining research, teaching, and learning, Exploratory Practice (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p. 191, 192) emphasizes “the importance of integrating the research into the pedagogy from the beginning to ensure sustainability, giving learners the opportunity to develop over time as practitioners of their own learning”. Teachers and learners work together as co-practitioners becoming researchers who investigate life in the classroom. Miller (2010) explains that they are “agents who construct, within their own social and institutional experiences, space and time”, to construct their understandings of the world.

In fact, my research paper was integrated into the class pedagogy as the pedagogy was integrated into my research, giving the learners and I the chance to develop as practitioners while working together. It is possible to observe some steps in my development as a teacher-researcher. Firstly, I tried to solve the problem of too much noise and shouting in the classroom by creating rules, by having serious talks with the students, by preparing more and more activities, hoping to keep them busy. Nothing worked. Secondly, I believed that practicing Yoga and Mindfulness meditation would help. But, even not intentionally, I imposed that to the group and apart from some quiet moments, the noise and shouting went on. Thirdly, I realized that Mindfulness and Exploratory Practice had something in common when considering life in the classroom. Exploratory Practice started to make sense to my teaching in a school that welcomes changes and innovation, gives the teachers autonomy to make decisions and choices. At that moment, I realized the relevance of involving the learners in a search for understanding what was going on in our classroom.

Placing the learners in the position of co-practitioners was an important step in my work for understanding. In this sense, the Five Propositions (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p. 5-7) reminded me who these learners were.

1) “Learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own idiosyncratic ways”.

Working with the group for two and a half hours, five times a week, made it possible to get to know the learners and see them as unique individuals, capable of learning in their own singular way. There were 13 students in the class developing and learning in a distinctive way. Besides their differences in family and cultural backgrounds, they were unique learners, considering the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (GARDNER, 2006). The students were treated as unique individuals and were offered a variety of learning opportunities to develop as language learners.

2) “Learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment”.

Our classroom could be considered a place where learners worked together and helped each other in a friendly environment. The students had opportunities to work individually, in pairs, in small or larger groups. When working as a team, I used different strategies for each proposed activity: self-selected group, randomly chosen group, or assigned according to some criteria. The learners enjoyed the most when they could pick their partners; however, they were productive in the other divisions. The 13 students seemed to enjoy being part of the group, learning, sharing responsibilities, and interacting as social beings in the classroom.

3) “Learners are capable of taking learning seriously”.

They were capable of taking their learning seriously in a very peculiar way from my point of view. In spite of being noisy and loud, they were committed to their tasks. They were involved in all the activities assigned in the classroom as well as the ones assigned as homework. They were motivated and it seemed that the noise and confusion did not prevent them from learning.

4) “Learners are capable of independent decision-making”.

The learners were offered many opportunities to make choices during the classes and even participate in the construction of the syllabi. The school gives the teachers freedom to decide with the learners what, when and how to learn as long as it fits the school Pedagogical Proposal in a constructivist framework.

5) “Learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning”.

Despite their age, the group was considered very responsible concerning the learning opportunities they had as well as the assignments for class or as homework. They were also considered mature in the way they interacted with each other since they treated their classmates respectfully, politely, and affectionately. The students were developing understandings of their own learning process.

An important principle of Exploratory Practice is to “prioritise understanding over problem-solving” (ALLWRIGHT; MILLER, 2001b). Understanding the puzzles in the classroom does not imply that changing is required. Changes may or may not happen. What really matters in the process of trying to understand is the awareness we bring to our practice as teachers and learners, but mostly as human beings. Allwright and Hanks (2009, p. 173) suggest that taking action for understanding involves “thinking and doing”. On that account, when teachers want to work for

understanding some issues in the classroom, thinking, reflecting, contemplating and analyzing are necessary as much as doing, preparing, organizing, monitoring and taking action. Besides, in order to work for understanding, it is essential to be aware of the present moment, to observe, and to pay attention on purpose to what happens in the classroom. By doing so, we combine the practice of Mindfulness to that of Exploratory Practice as paths to become more aware in the classroom. Mindful teaching and Exploratory Practice focus on bringing awareness to the moments that teachers and learners share in the classroom to make them pleasant and productive for everyone. Jennings (2015, p. 139) explains that

our goal is to create and maintain the optimal conditions for learning. When something interferes with this goal, we take time to mindfully observe and adjust the classroom elements and their dynamics rather than reactively trying to control the students.

Observing mindfully and adjusting the classroom elements can be related to working for understanding. Jennings (2015), Allwright and Hanks (2009) seem to agree that controlling or solving the problem may be secondary or even not necessary, if teachers and learners work together cooperating, collaborating, sharing, and constructing knowledge continuously. When working together, Allwright and Hanks (2009, p. 226) claim that teachers and learners develop “trust and collegiality”. The idea is that “working for understanding life in the classroom will provide a good foundation for helping teachers and learners make their time together pleasant and productive” (ALLWRIGHT, 2003, p. 114), which is the desirable condition for learning.

A point of convergence between Mindful teaching and Exploratory Practice seem to be the concern with the well being of teachers and learners in the

classroom. As a living system, the classroom is connected to other living systems either inside or outside the school, being a very dynamic place where changes happen all the time. Thinking about the school year, the learners at the beginning of the year are not going to be the same individuals at the end of the year, not even the teachers. Considering lesson plans, the planning done for one group does not work with another group, it needs to be reinvented. Reflecting upon my practice as a teacher-educator, I am constantly changing, learning and improving, aware of it or not.

This dynamism is part of the classroom reality and it can be a positive or negative experience. Teachers and learners are exposed to social and emotional challenges on a daily basis. Despite all the tasks related to teaching, teachers have to manage conflicts in the classroom, to deal with students' disruptive behavior, and to cope with stressful situations. It may provoke in the teachers what Jennings (2009, p. 492) refers to as 'burnout cascade'. The author (JENNINGS, 2015, p. 98) points out that burnout may involve "emotional exhaustion" and "the lack of a sense of personal accomplishments or efficacy". On the same subject, Allwright (2009, p. 253) explains that, originally, Exploratory Practice was "an attempt to help bridge the teacher-researcher gap, and to help teachers resist burnout", which could be considered as a threat. The main point is that social and emotional competences are required to help teachers avoid burnout. Without a question, teaching has become more demanding over the past years, as Jennings (2015, p. 42) puts it

[...] under the old paradigm, when a child misbehaved, the teacher typically responded with punishment. In contrast, under the new paradigm, [...] the teacher responds by providing assistance and support to help the child behave appropriately [...] To do this requires high degrees of self-regulation, both attentional and emotional.

Being responsible to manage and to take care of many things simultaneously, teachers do need to find ways to self-regulate their emotions, thoughts and attitudes. Practicing Mindfulness may improve the quality of life in the classroom and have an impact on the well-being of teachers and learners. The practice may also help teachers achieve a better understanding of learners' emotional needs to handle the classroom routine. And stress is part of the routine. Meiklejohn (2012) points out that "like other demanding professions, teachers deserve and need methods of maintaining good executive function in the context of their elevated work-related stress". Mindful teaching is probably a good way to manage the job demands.

Another point of convergence between Mindful teaching and Exploratory Practice is the interest in quality of life in the classroom. Quality of life refers mostly to the learning environment and teacher-learner interaction. Gieve and Miller (2006, p. 19) present the notion of quality of classroom life based on the idea that "our personal and our professional lives are interwoven". The well-being of teachers and learners can be seen as a major concern for a healthy classroom environment. Two out of the seven principles proposed by Allwright and Hanks (2009) refer to quality of life. "These principles have been developed collaboratively by Allwright and the members of the Rio Exploratory Practice Group [...] and have been presented in a variety of layouts and formats, depending on the various contexts and purposes." (MILLER; CUNHA, 2017, p. 68). In their book, Allwright and Hanks (2009, p. 149-154) present the seven principles as follows:

Principle 1: 'Quality of life' for language teachers and learners is the most appropriate central concern for practitioner research in our field.

Principle 2: Working primarily to understand the 'quality of life', as it is experienced by language learners and teachers, is more important than, and logically prior to, seeking in any way to improve it.

Principle 3: Everybody needs to be involved in the work for understanding.

Principle 4: The work needs to serve to bring people together.

Principle 5: The work needs to be conducted in a spirit of mutual development.

Principle 6: Working for understanding is necessarily a continuous enterprise.

Principle 7: Integrating the work for understanding fully into existing curricular practices is a way of minimizing the burden and maximizing sustainability.

All the seven principles inspired my understandings of the reality of my classroom. As already mentioned, my research paper and the classroom pedagogy were integrated since all the activities were part of the teaching-learning process. In reality, the process was constructed and re-constructed with the learners and I did not have any expectation of the events to come. When I introduced the practice of Mindfulness, my major concern was the quality of life, not only because I felt worried and disturbed by the way the learners behaved and the noise they made in class, but also because I was convinced that in a quieter environment, they would embrace more learning opportunities. At that moment and for that group, I believed that practicing Mindfulness would contribute to developing a better quality of life in the classroom. Apparently, my understanding of quality of life was different from the learners' understanding. The noise bothered me, yet the learners did not seem to be disturbed by that. For this reason, aiming to involve the learners in the working for understanding, I asked them 'Why are we noisy in the classroom?' When I asked them, I was truly trying to understand life in the classroom. The question was meant to bring us together as co-practitioners. Using the pronoun 'we', I was part of the

group, seeking for our mutual development not only as language teacher and learners, but also as human beings. This process was a continuous enterprise, at least, for that specific group during that school year.

One point of convergence between Mindfulness and Exploratory Practice is the emphasis on 'being' over 'doing'. Teaching involves a lot of 'doing' in a very dynamic routine and 'doing' is related to judgment, evaluation, analysis, problem solving, achievement, planning, and critical thinking, while 'being' is related to non-judgment, non-striving, acceptance, compassion, and awareness. Kabat-Zinn (2013a, p. 20) suggests that

Learning how to stop all your doing and shift over to a 'being' mode, learning how to make time for yourself, how to slow down and nurture calmness and self-acceptance in yourself, learning to observe what your own mind is up to from moment to moment, how to watch your thoughts and how to let go of them without getting so caught up and driven by them, how to make room for new ways of seeing old problems and for perceiving the interconnectedness of things, these are some of the lessons of mindfulness. This kind of learning involves settling into moments of being and cultivating awareness.

When teachers and learners understand the importance of cultivating awareness, Mindfulness becomes a way of 'being' everywhere, just as Exploratory Practice is a way of 'being' in the classroom. The teacher-learner relationships constructed through shared experiences, participation in activities, and engagement have long-lasting implications for the students' emotional and social development. 'Being' in the classroom is also related to "our capacity for connectedness" (PALMER, 2014). About connectedness, the author (PALMER, 2007, p. 11) asserts that teachers

[...] are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves [...] The connectedness made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts [...]

Connectedness in the classroom environment comprises positive relationships not only among teachers and students but also among students and their peers. Therefore, teachers and learners are interconnected in the classroom and they influence one another by the way they behave, talk, understand the world, and care for each other. Kabat-Zinn (2013a, p. 220) goes beyond the classroom and broadens the concept of connectedness in suggesting that “meaning and relationship are strands of connectedness. They weave your life as an individual into a larger tapestry, a larger whole, which, you might say, actually gives your life its individuality”. For the author, love is the energy that feeds connectedness.

Principles 3, 4 and 5 (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p. 149-154) encompass the concept of connectedness, where teachers and learners work and reflect together on what puzzles them. In essence, Exploratory Practice is about working together in order to have collective awareness and understandings of life in the classroom.

Teacher-learners connectedness also comprises mutual respect, care and trust. Allwright (2009, Handout) points out the importance of mutual trust in the pedagogical context by claiming that “teachers and learners involved in Exploratory Practice seem to be developing trust relationships as a by-product of their work together”. Trust in the classroom is built on commitment, honesty and reliability. Trust (KABAT-ZINN, 2013a, p. 36-37), along with other attitudes, has to be cultivated. Most of the times, teachers seem “to be far too busy doing his or her job to be able to be properly aware at the same time” (ALLWRIGHT, 1996). Jennings (2015, p. 46-47)

points out that “in open monitoring you broaden your awareness to the whole panorama of present-moment experience”. Both Allwright and Jennings share the view that monitoring what happens during the class is essential for understanding life in the classroom.

## MONITORING AND POTENTIALLY EXPLOITABLE PEDAGOGIC ACTIVITIES

A way to take action to understand a puzzle could start with observing, monitoring life in the classroom. “For Exploratory Practice, the term ‘puzzle’ represents our concern for developing understandings in relation to issues of immediate interest, whether or not they are ‘problematic’ and whether or not we connect them to theory.” (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.176). When I identified my puzzle, I started paying more attention to the students while they were doing their daily activities. I kept a diary and took notes of the comments they made, as well as, their body language, how they behaved and expressed feelings and emotions, and how they interacted with peers. I kept a record of what was relevant or different on each day. This action is what Allwright (1996) calls unintrusive activity since the notes can be undertaken “from a distance while the learners are engaged in group work or simply making mental notes while they are talking”. Monitoring the learners is a way of becoming aware of life in the classroom since learners and teachers are “involved in the moment-to-moment micro-management of classroom events” (ALLWRIGHT, 2003). Monitoring implies the awareness to pay attention to what is going on in the classroom. Consequently, it requires intention, attention and attitude (SHAPIRO, 2009). The fact that for the Bilingual Program we decided not to follow textbooks allowed me more freedom to work and to pay attention to the learners’ needs and curiosity.

Besides monitoring the learners, Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs) were developed in the classroom. “We come to use the term PEPA [...] for such classroom practice that also constitute work for understanding” (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p. 157). Therefore, the activities here presented were part of the working for understanding all the noise in the classroom. In the Exploratory Practice

Group, at PUC-Rio, the members (BARRETO; REIS; MILLER; MONTEIRO; CUNHA; MOURA) have extended the notion of PEPAs beyond the classroom (EWALD, 2015, p. 52-53). The activities can be applied in other contexts outside the school.

The PEPA chosen to be presented in this research paper started when I wrote the question 'Why are we noisy in the classroom?' on the board. The pronoun 'we' in the question provoked some reflections and the learners understood that I was part of the group and that sometimes I had to raise my voice to be heard. Next, I handed them some paper to write down their answers. While they were writing their answers, I copied the question on craft paper. I helped them paste their text on the craft paper and then I invited them to share with the group. They laughed at their classmates' answers, making comments, trying to explain their own answers. I tried to keep the learners involved as much as I could. On the following day, I asked the same question again and invited the learners to illustrate their answers. They expressed themselves in a very creative way using markers and colored pencils to draw. Their texts and pictures were displayed in the classroom. As the learners visualized their own productions, they participated by explaining their answers and pictures. During the interaction, most learners chose to express themselves in Portuguese, their native language.

The learners' drawings and written texts are shown here as part of the material gathered during the classes. To justify my choice of presenting their drawings, I rely on Allwright and Hanks's (2009, p. 197) beliefs that

language learning is about words [...] But, quite apart from some understandings being ultimately 'too deep for words', learners may be better at expressing their understandings in another way [...] Combining words with visual representations may help.

The combination of text and drawing seems relevant considering the learners' age and level of English. Other choices were made in order to present the students' productions. One is that the learners' texts had no spelling corrections. Another is that the learners' names were changed to protect their identities. And the other is that the pictures were organized in a random sequence and the same sequence is presented throughout the paper.

Picture 1



*"Because nobody is perfect". (Pedro – 5<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016)*

Pedro made an attempt to convey the idea that 'nobody is perfect' by drawing four distinct figures. The facial expressions, body movements and details of each figure may convey the idea that people are different in their own unique way. Comparing the drawing to the verbiage, we might say that Pedro may have had intention to include himself by using the pronoun 'we' written inside one of the figures while, in the text, he may have wanted to generalize by using of the word 'nobody' suggesting that there is little to be done about the shouting in the classroom.

Picture 2



*“Because in the play time we play a lot”.* (Caio – 4<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016)

By writing ‘because in the play time we play a lot’ it seems that Caio tried to justify the shouting in the classroom by mentioning the fact that they have some free time to play right after lunch before they start the activities. In his drawing, Caio tried to represent what he and his friends do when they play outside the classroom. The green object in the picture is a see-saw that the students used to divide the area while playing *queimado*, a game in which players try to hit other players on the opposing team with the ball while avoiding being hit themselves. A similar American game would be dodgeball.

Picture 3



*“Because we are excited!”* (Milena – 5<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016 )

Milena chose the word ‘excited’ to justify the noise in the classroom. By using the pronoun ‘we’ she includes herself in the group. In her drawing, in order to transmit the idea of excitement she used bright colors to portrait a figure. The shape of the head, the eyes, the tongue sticking out of the mouth, and the hair of the figure is probably the way she used to represent the word ‘excited’.

Picture 4

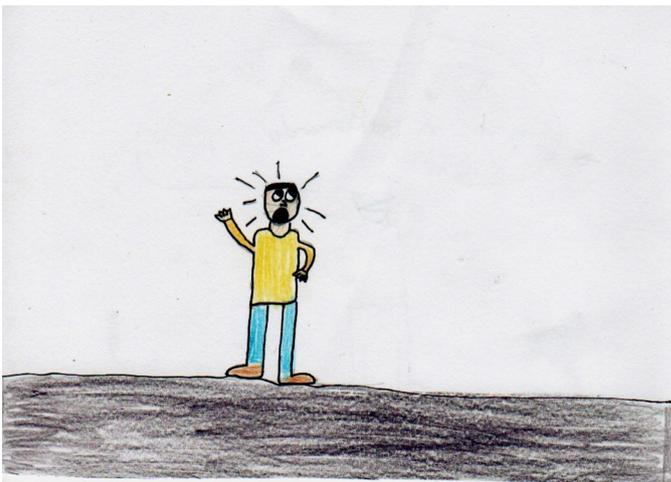


*“Because everybody speak laugher.”* (Sara – 4<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016 )

The way Sara made each one responsible for the noise is shown by the choice of the word ‘everybody’ In addition, the word ‘laugher’ is, in fact, misspelled, since she meant to write loud. She probably used the suffix ‘er’ at the end to emphasize the word loud. Her drawing reveals two students behind their desks wearing the school uniform. Sara may have had the intention to indicate that they are talking by drawing both figures with the mouth opened. In the bubbles, she may have tried to suggest some disconnection in their speeches since it appears that the figures are talking to each other and while the one on the left said ‘I like banana!’, the

figure on the right, said 'fly?!'. There is a possibility that Sara tried to indicate that the noise in the classroom prevented the two students from listening to each other, or she may have tried to represent that the students were not paying attention to each other. Clearly, there might be other ways to interpret her drawing. However, since she used the word 'loud', she could be referring to the noise in the classroom.

Picture 5



*"Because the people are talking loght in the classroom". (Bruno – 5<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016)*

The choice that Bruno made by using *the people* may represent that he did not include himself in the group that shouts in the classroom or that he was an observer of his noisy classmates. The word 'loght' is misspelled; he certainly meant 'loud'. In spite of using 'the people' to refer to his classmates, he drew a picture of a single figure and represented the idea of talking or being noisy by the lines around the head and the opened mouth.

Picture 6



*“Because we are what we are”*. (Camila – 4<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016 )

It is possible to say that the drawing does not express exactly what Camila meant when she wrote ‘because we are what we are’ since she repeatedly drew this kind of dolls in different clothes and colors for several other activities. In the drawing there is probably only one indication of the shouting issue, which is the way she chose to draw the figure with an open mouth. Camila may have tried to suggest that there is nothing to be done about the shouting in the classroom when she expressed herself writing ‘we are what we are’. Using the pronoun ‘we’, she included herself in the group and may have tried to convey the idea that the students were noisy because that was the way they were and there was nothing to be done about it or maybe that there was no need for changes.

Picture 7



“Because the people talk very much.” (Isadora – 4<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016 )

Isadora chose to represent the classroom in a more conventional way where the students are wearing uniforms, sitting at their desks in a row. The teacher could be standing or sitting behind her own desk pointing to the abc’s on the board. The only indication, in the picture, that the students might be talking is that Isadora drew their mouths as a circle. By using the word *people*, it seems that Isadora did not include herself in the group.

Picture 8



*“Because shout is god for a kid! And I am a kid!”* (Gabriel – 4<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016)

Gabriel tried to define shouting as being ‘good for a kid. And since he is a kid’, shouting is part of childhood, according to his saying. In his drawing, the mouth of the figure is opened and even showing the teeth. Only one word in the speech bubble is clear, ‘banana’, the other does not mean anything either in English or in Portuguese.

Picture 9



*“Because we are very crazy”.* (Viviane – 5<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016 )

In both drawing and verbiage, Viviane tried to express the same idea of being crazy. It seems that the difference is that in the drawing, she drew only one girl and used the pronoun ‘I’ in the speech bubble while in the verbiage she used the pronoun ‘we’. The colorful drawing has some characteristics that indicate what she had in mind such as the eyes and the tongue of the girl as well as the colorful hair. The girl in the picture is pointing both thumbs to herself to probably indicate that she is the one that is crazy.

Picture 10



*"Because we are very excited". (Fabio – 4<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016 )*

Fabio used the word 'excited' to refer to how the group behaved in the classroom. Choosing to use the pronoun 'we' indicates that he included himself in the group. The actions that the characters created in his picture are performing may indicate what he meant by using the word 'excited'. The figure on the left is probably shouting; the one in the middle is writing on the wall; and the one on the right is standing on a table holding a microphone and singing. The chairs and tables may convey the idea that they are in the classroom. Fabio might have had the intention of showing actions that the students were not expected to perform during their class, but because they are 'very excited' they do it anyway.

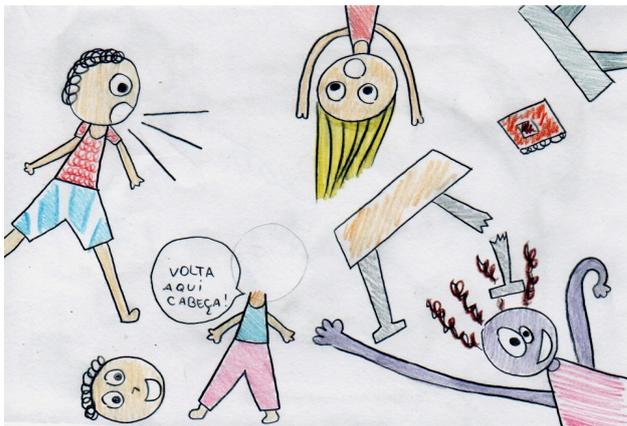
Picture 11



*“Because we are we. And I scared of the play that is coming?”* (Mila – 5<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016 )

When Mila wrote *‘because we are we’*, she might have had the intention of communicating that each student is different and should be seen as an individual. In the second sentence, she mentioned being “scared” about the presentation of a school play that would take place in July, more than two months ahead. She expressed two distinct ideas that seem to be mixed in her drawing. She might have referred to the classroom by drawing the desk and the chair; however, the chair may be an indication that she is relating to the presentation. The object on the top right hand side looks like a radio, but nothing similar was used in our context. The colorful ribbons hanging from the top might remind us of a theater although it does not relate to anything done in the classroom.

Picture 12



*“Because we are very messy.”* (Brenda – 5<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016)

In order to convey the idea of being messy, Brenda drew a picture that might indicate a classroom because of the two desks and a copybook. There are four figures performing different actions in her drawing. The one on the left side is probably shouting and she chose to suggest that by drawing the opened mouth as

well as the lines. The figure on the top is upside down. For this one, Brenda drew the opened mouth, but no line to indicate talking or shouting. The figure on the right bottom was hit by a broken piece of the leg of the desk. The expression on its face may suggest pain. Also on the bottom more to the left side, there is a headless figure, whose head is probably on the floor. Next to this figure, there is a speech bubble that says *volta aqui cabeça!* meaning 'come back head'. Brenda may have tried to indicate by writing 'we are very messy' that students perform in the classroom actions that they are not supposed to and their actions may have serious consequences as the figure that was hit in the head, for instance.

Picture 13



*"Beacaus we like to be noisy". (Theo – 4<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016 )*

Theo drew a picture showing details of the classroom. From top to bottom, on the wall, he drew the air conditioner, the boarder about the months of the year, and the white board. On the left, he drew the shelf where the students keep their copybooks. On the top shelf, the picture in blue represents the globe. The figure standing might be the teacher explaining something that is written on the board while two students are probably sitting at their desks. The lines around the head may convey the idea of being noisy or shouting while the teacher is talking. Theo used the

pronoun 'we' which might imply that he included himself in the group. Moreover, the use of the verb 'like' may suggest that the students enjoy being noisy.

In search for understandings about my puzzle, I tried to involve the learners in the process. I stimulated them to think about ways to improve the quality of life in our classroom and to take responsibility for their own actions and attitudes. At this point, we were working together. As part of the next PEPA, the learners answered the following question 'What can we do to stop being noisy in the classroom?' Their written texts were commented and discussed in the group. This time, they answered the question without drawing and their texts are shown in the following chapter.

## ANALYSIS AND REFLECTIONS

As Allwright and Miller (2001b) put it, “we don’t notice *everything* equally. We notice different things in different ways, at different times”, referring to selective attention. Based on this concept, it seems relevant to explain that the analysis I make for this research is related to the experiences I have as a teacher who is undergoing the process of developing as a practitioner researcher. This research paper itself is like a photograph in which I tried to describe a single moment in the classroom life. These frozen moments were definitely preceded by many unique moments and will certainly be followed by other moments. The way I interpret these unique moments in time is a matter of making choices, based on what I am able to notice.

The chart below presents the learners written texts gathered during the PEPAs when they answered the two questions in the search to understand my puzzle about the noise they made in the classroom.

	<b>Why are we noisy in the classroom?</b>	<b>What can we do to stop being noisy in the classroom?</b>
Pedro	“Because nobody is perfect”.	“Each person has to sit in the same place”.
Caio	“Because in the play time we play a lot”.	“Put all the desks together”.
Milena	“Because we are excited!”	“Sit were the teacher put the name”.
Sara	“Because everybody speak laugher.”	“Be calm after the playtime”.

Bruno	"Because the people are talking loght in the classroom".	"separated chairs"
Camila	"Because we are what we are".	"Make yoga, briving activit and meditacion".
Isadora	"Because the people talk very much."	"Everybody make your part, and nobody shout in the classroom".
Gabriel	"Because shout is god for a kid! And I am a kid!"	"Put music".
Viviane	"Because we are very crazy".	"The solution was no shoutin or go to Paulo".
Fabio	"Because we are very excited".	"The person that are shouting goes to Paulo's room".
Mila	"Because we are we. And I scared of the play that is coming?"	"A time to we sleep and relax in the air-condionador".
Brenda	"Because we are very messy."	"Put together everybory".
Theo	"Becaus we like to be noisy".	"Everyone try it to speak a little bit more lower".

What called my attention when the learners answered the second question was the fact that five out of the thirteen students wrote that attempting to stop being noisy in the classroom was related to seating arrangements. For this group, the teacher has the power to decide where they should sit and how the desks are to be organized. By imposing or determining where they sit, the teacher may control the noise the learners make in the classroom. Consequently, the teacher is

responsible for the noise they make and, as the teacher, I have the power and the tools to prevent the shouting, whistling and singing, according to the learners.

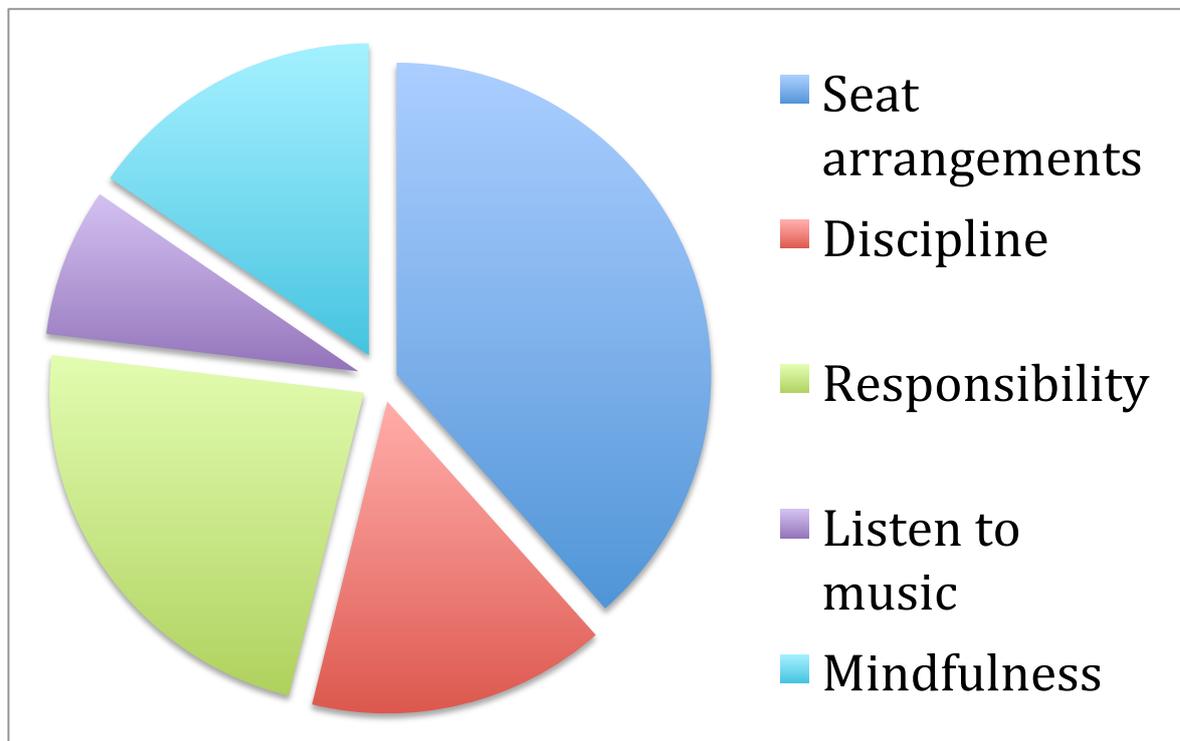
Two students mentioned the coordinator, Paulo, who is a psychologist and deals with behavior and interactional problems the students might have at school. For these students, punishment is the solution, meaning that if they do something they are not supposed to, it is the coordinator's responsibility to deal with the problem. Again, making a lot of noise in the classroom requires someone else's attitude; in this case, the coordinator is the one that, in the students' opinion, has the power to control the situation. These learners did not realize, up to that moment, that they might change their attitude so as to contribute in a more positive way to the classroom atmosphere.

One learner mentioned music and what he wanted to convey was that I should play songs while they were doing the activities so that they all could sing. For this student, the noise does not seem to bother him. It is as if he were not aware of what was happening in the classroom. As he put himself in this position, he made it clear that he did not have to make any effort to try to understand or even to help to make the classroom a more pleasant place.

Three students out of thirteen seemed to take ownership over their behavior and learning. Their responses may indicate that they shared a view that their attitudes and responsibilities as members of the group are valued. The use of the pronouns 'everyone' and 'everybody' may reveal that, for them, the whole group should cooperate in order to construct a better learning environment.

Two students made connections with Mindfulness practice, one very explicitly. These learners might have understood our practice as a way to build a healthier environment, aiming at the quality of life in the classroom. Their text made me reflect if I was imposing the practice or if I was offering them an important tool.

The graph might help visualize the learners' answers. The image represents, at that specific moment, how the learners felt about the school environment and also how they perceived their role as students.



In spite of having only two students referring to Mindfulness in the PEPA as a way to avoid the noise and confusion in the classroom, the practice contributed to building new understandings and provided the learners with a tool for future experiences. The practice was not intended to prevent the students from shouting, singing and whistling during the classes, but to help them realize that they can express themselves in different ways. One of the students, Isadora, tried to explain the importance of the practice by saying that “we are always in a hurry and we need to slow down a little” (*A gente corre muito e temos que parar um pouco* - notes from my diary on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016). On this topic, Kabat-Zinn (2011a) remarks that “we are so busy doing, doing, doing all the time and thinking is part of the doing [...] that

there is very little time to drop into being”. He adds that to drop into being refers to “our interconnectedness with the world, with life on the planet”. Therefore, Mindfulness is a way of being (KABAT-ZINN, 2013c), in relation to everybody and everything, wherever we are, anytime, alone or not.

Another student, Mila, referring to paying attention said, “it’s a lot difficult because sometimes I see everything and forget what I am doing” (It’s a lot difficult because sometimes *eu olho tudo e esqueço o que estou fazendo* - notes from my diary on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016). There is no doubt that all the learners in the group receive a lot of visual and audio stimuli inside and outside the classroom. Kabat-Zinn (2011a) observes that “we are continually scanning the world for something more interesting than this [...] We are so interested in what we might be missing that we are actually missing this moment.” And he alerts the audience to the fact that, in reality, this moment is the only moment we actually have and that “without awareness, you can see and not see. Without awareness, things could be coming to your ears and you don’t hear”. Understanding that teachers and learners are surrounded by technological devices, that multitasking is part of the routine and that our world is filled with distractions might help to explain why it becomes so hard to be connected to the present moment.

Reflecting on my own practice as a teacher, I had the opportunity to capture some details that I would easily miss. From my perspective, despite the efforts to make Mindfulness a daily practice, it was very difficult to be totally present all the time, to pay close attention to the students’ talk, to deeply listen to them, to analyze their productions without judging, to be aware of their individual needs, to focus my attention without multitasking. There were times when I did not want to be in the classroom. Other times, I did not want to be interrupted by my students when I had so much to accomplish. Most of the times, I was so worried about the content to be

delivered that I did not allow them more free time to play. From the learners' point of view, they were kept busy most of the time by working individually, in pairs or in groups, by being challenged to engage in different kinds of activities, and by being involved in their interactions.

A major concern in the attempt to bring Mindfulness to the group was the value given to "quality of life in the classroom" (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, GIEVE; MILLER, 2006). The practice helped enrich the teacher-learner connection and the learners' relationships. Besides these moments of intentional practice, there were hugs, many 'I love you, teacher' notes and cards, smiles, eye contacts, secret telling, laughs and shouting, a lot of shouting. I come to the conclusion that there is still a lot of work to be done because I believe that Mindfulness is not a concept, it is practice; it is not a technique, it is a way of living (KABAT-ZINN, 2011a). Mindfulness is a way of being in relation to everything (KABAT-ZINN, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

This research paper presents my own journey as a schoolteacher and as a student in the Specialization Course in English Language at PUC-Rio. Right before the course, I was doing my job and studying about Mindfulness on my own. During the course, I was introduced to Exploratory Practice and with the help of all the professors, especially my advisors, I learned about puzzles, quality of life, mutual development, collegiality, sustainability, monitoring, and understandings. I learned that it is possible to do research in the classroom, which caused some changes in the way I now see myself as a teacher. It helped me to enhance the value of the profession I chose, in a society that undervalues and even despises such an important profession. The course also offered me tools to improve my own teaching practice. But, most of all, it provided useful lessons for me as a human being. Now, I understand that the purpose of either Mindfulness or Exploratory Practice is not to change who we are, but recognize who we really are and cultivate the best in ourselves. In the beginning of this research paper, my goal was to answer the question “Why should my students and I practice Mindfulness in the classroom?” I believe that, in some ways, the learners and I reached some understandings during our practice and PEPAs in the classroom.

The choice of using Exploratory Practice as a guideline allowed the learners and I to make inspiring reflections about our life in the classroom. The learners had the opportunity to think about and discuss their impressions on the way they acted and behaved at school. In spite of expressing different opinions about the shouting and singing in the classroom, the material presented showed that the learners seemed not to be bothered by the noise, perhaps because it did not prevent them from learning or doing their work well. The data also provided interesting information

on how the learners understand their social role at school and their relationship with the adults (teachers and coordinators). Changes did not happen. I believe a more silent environment is best for learning and their shouting, singing and whistling bothered me. When I took action to try to understand the way the learners behaved, I had the chance to rethink and reevaluate my own practice and, most of all, I reached some new understandings.

According to the material gathered through the PEPAs, only two students mentioned Mindfulness as a way of preventing the noise in the classroom. At first, I was disappointed, but deeply reflecting on that, I understood Mindfulness as a way of being, not a way of solving problems of any kind. Practicing Mindfulness in the classroom did not change the way the group acted or behaved. It did not change my own beliefs as a teacher. The practice was a tool for awareness and individual understandings.

At the end of the course at PUC-Rio, I realized that I did not want the course to end. Thinking it over, I become aware that, in reality, the course has no end. It is a continuous process since the end of the course may be the beginning of something else. I have the same feeling about this research paper. It seems to be not finished, there is still a lot to read and write. Both Mindfulness and Exploratory Practice are ways of 'being' in the classroom. In spite of all the 'doing' that has to be accomplished, our classroom is a place of interaction, affection, and construction. Working for understanding should never end, it needs to be a continuous enterprise. The more I study and read, the more I understand that there is so much more to be done. Or, perhaps, I can use the words of Inés Miller and Maria Isabel A. Cunha (Bebel) (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p. 221) to try to express what I really mean,

*Inés:* You know, I don't believe we can put life into closed boxes, compartments, structures... Maybe the longer we live, the more we understand that living involves learning to accept complexity.

*Bebel:* That's what I like in EP, this lack of rigidity. We have a few principles and a flexible practice.

The flexibility that the Exploratory Practice offers as a way of doing research enables teachers and learners to discover the possibility of new understandings about their roles and practices in the classroom. Even though the findings in this paper refer to a group of thirteen students, they bring to light the importance of a new way of 'being' in the classroom and it may pave the way for further research.

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