



Pós-Graduação Lato Sensu em Língua Inglesa

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**WHY DO SOME OF MY 6TH GRADE STUDENTS FACE
DIFFICULTIES IN DOING SCHOOL RESEARCH?**

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to bring to light a discussion about the understanding obtained through the work done in class. Bearing in mind that life and work must be part of this process, because all the participants who interact in class share their lived experiences, which they construct, and they are still constructing inside and outside of school. In order to achieve this, teachers must reflect about the judgment they have about their work and, consequently, the judgment they build about their students. Taking into consideration whom these classes are addressed to, this paper tries to show that teachers and students can do research together. Furthermore, it became clear that the investigation is meaningful for both learner and teachers to develop as practitioners, as they obtain better quality of life in their classes.

Keywords: Reflective Practice; Exploratory Practice; Seven Principles; Quality of life, Practitioners.

RESUMO

O objetivo desta pesquisa é trazer à luz uma discussão sobre o entendimento que se constrói através do trabalho feito em aula. Tendo em mente que vida e trabalho devem fazer parte deste fazer didático, porque todos os participantes que interagem na sala de aula compartilham experiências que eles constroem e que ainda estão construindo dentro e fora da escola. Para alcançar isto, professores devem refletir tanto sobre o julgamento que fazem de seu trabalho como, conseqüentemente, o julgamento que eles desenvolveram a respeito de seus alunos. Levando em consideração para quem estas aulas são endereçadas, ou seja, a bagagem de conhecimento, o repertório do aluno bem como suas experiências devem ser fatores a serem observados pelos professores. Este trabalho mostra que, quando professores e alunos juntos realizam uma pesquisa escolar que seja significativa, isto contribui para o desenvolvimento de ambos como “praticantes”, que quer dizer que não estão à mercê de uma educação bancária. Desta forma é possível obter uma melhor qualidade de vida em sala de aula.

Keywords: Práticas Reflexivas; Práticas exploratórias; Sete Princípios; Qualidade de vida; Praticantes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

We cannot solve our problems with the same
thinking we used when we created them.
Albert Einstein

The objective of this paper is to report on my research for the post-graduate course in English Language Teaching. The theme came from my observations of 6th grades students from a public school, who presented some difficulties in doing school assignments involving research, when they were asked to do them. In addition to this, some of my co-workers (teachers) used to complain about the way students did the assigned research projects. This research studies public school students from three 6th grade groups (601, 602, 603), whose students were eleven and twelve years old. It is equally important to notice that these students came from poor communities and had experienced social problems which might have influenced their learning and behaviour.

In view of these issues, I came up with the idea of researching this problematic situation so as to investigate it and bring this discussion to light, as an attempt to understand its causes and its gaps, and also to try to find a way to promote more discussion on the topic, at the school. As a teacher, I could notice that the problem of doing school research among students from elementary and secondary grades was very serious. So, my question came from this situation. “Why do some of my 6th grade students face difficulties in doing school research?”

So as to bring this understanding to light I did a series of activities which demanded students to do some investigation during our class, in order to check what the difficulties would be, when they had to work on their own. I also analysed the way I asked them to do the assigned research, and I explored the kinds of research assignments learners develop by themselves in a more independent way. Due to this, the data analysed was related not only to my learners but also to my own workplace.

The approaches which fit this qualitative research were two: 1. Reflective Practice, whose theory helps teachers to act reflexively and to think about what is done before and after classes, and 2. Exploratory Practice, whose theory is based on searching for understanding issues from the classroom that intrigue teachers and students, promoting reflection around these issues in order to develop learners

and teachers as practitioners of their learning/teaching process. According to Allwright and Hanks (2009, p.2) “So why not try to think of learners as *practitioners of learning*, and not just as ‘targets of teaching?’”

I hope this research has its value since students and teachers need to develop this relationship with research assignments throughout a long period of schooling. It is hoped that, by debating what kind of school research they are expected to develop, we can improve the understandings upon this issue. This work reports a participative, ethical and pedagogical research project which intends to understand the environment of the learners at school and in their social life.

Finally, the purpose of this study is to show research in a classroom environment as an attempt to reach deeper levels of understandings of what is done in class through language teaching, by teachers and students.

2. JUSTIFICATION

I have never thought of being a teacher. I thought of working in another occupation like secretary, receptionist... In order to improve my qualification, I decided to study English. However, during the courses, I started to enjoy studying this language and soon my first opportunity to work came with an invitation to teach English to kids. Afterwards, this invitation was extended to work with teenagers from elementary to intermediate levels. As far as I am concerned, being a teacher was something that came into my life unexpectedly. Although at the very beginning, it was just a common job, a way of working and earning a living, as time passed, I became more and more involved with teaching issues and I got more experience in the teaching-learning process. I had realized that teaching implied dealing with people and not only with subjects, and this discovery made all the difference for me as a teacher. If, at the beginning, teaching used to be just a job, it soon became more meaningful to me. My relationship with the act of teaching increased my attention to some issues that I was beginning to understand.

As I was worried about my students and their learning process, I started wondering (myself) why some students had difficulties in learning what I was explaining. In order to solve such a problem, I thought that buying more books with a wide range of various exercises would make my students learn what I was teaching. These books were valuable, but they did not fulfil my wish to get my students ready to learn what I was teaching them. After some time, I understood that the learning process is different for each person and I calmed down and controlled my anxiety.

I began by listening to my students. I admit that sometimes I didn't give me and them, a chance to observe what was happening around us while I was teaching and they were learning. Although I knew that something during my observation would go unnoticed, I persisted in doing it without knowing what exactly I was doing there.

On many occasions, I lost control and became impatient with my students' learning process. Or even trying to be in control of how and what they should learn according to my perspective. I noticed that the students weren't interested in what I was teaching. So, I had the idea of asking them why they were not interested. The answers were many! Of course, I couldn't realize that they had

such ideas about the issue I was studying. They complained about the book, about the exercises, and even about me! It was hard to listen to them expressing their thoughts, but I respected their opinions and kept thinking about all this.

However, all of this made me more intrigued about my work, about this “learning and teaching process”. So, I decided to study more, to understand more, to watch other teachers’ classes, to take notes and perceive things that I hadn’t noticed before, to see the way other teachers teach, to listen to things that I hadn’t been told... I went to seminars, I did an exchange course to realize the importance of the language I was teaching, and its usefulness in the social context. I saw Mexican people, Japanese people, Turkish people, and other people from different parts of the world speaking English with their own accents. I understood how complex it was. I saw myself in a foreign country like my students were, during our classes, and I felt the insecurity, the loneliness of having to speak another language that is not really ours! To feel frustrated, to be afraid of exposing myself to strangers - I put myself in my student’s place and it was hard. It made me feel under terrible pressure. There were days that I would like to run away from there, other days less unbearable, and after some time I was getting used to the language, gaining self-confidence in expressing myself without the fear I felt before.

I came back to Brazil with the sensation that I had had a wonderful experience and that it had given me an idea of how my students felt about the language which was not theirs, how hard it was to express themselves, and all the feelings of fear, frustration, and deception that the learning process might bring to the learner.

DIVERSITY AND NEW CHALLENGES AT THE PUBLIC SCHOOL

When I started teaching at a public school, I had another picture of the learning process, completely different from private English classes, or even English language course classrooms. It was another hard experience to be faced as a teacher. First, because these schools, most of the time, lack equipment like video, data show, and computers which, even when they exist, are not in good conditions to be used. On top of that, the classrooms are overcrowded and this makes it difficult for teachers to address students’ doubts and needs. And although these students receive course books, there aren’t enough for everyone.

Another problem is that these students come from different social and cultural backgrounds and some live in communities ruled by militia and gangsters. Due to this social reality, some kids are very aggressive, shouting at teachers and showing little ability to express their ideas verbally. Additionally, many girls are teenage mothers and some boys have to work to help their families at home and this does not contribute to their formal education.

Another important aspect to be considered is the fact that these kids and teenagers are also kind and some of them lack attention and affection. They also, don't have easy access to cultural events like plays, museum visits, art exhibits and so on.

Within this scope, teaching gained an important value to me, as I got to know the students and their reality and I realized that teaching involved including the students' social background, their life outside of the classroom, a life with its particularity and specificity.

Due to this, I revised my literature and changed the kind of book I would read in order to understand my work in that scenario. The first one I read was *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire, followed by *Education as a Liberating Practice*, by the same author. These books helped me a lot to interact with my students and consequently I noticed that our classes became a little bit more enjoyable for all of us. However, the difficulty they had in doing research assignments was still there.

So, I looked for books which discussed assessment in the classroom. Then I found one which caught my attention: *Learning School Assessment* by Cipriano C. Luckesi. I changed the way I assessed my students, but all that effort and research on teaching and learning process was far from ending.

Time passed and my reflections about teaching at a school increased. Another aspect of teaching was understood: learners want to talk. They want to talk about themselves, their realities, their experiences about their community. When they find space for these topics, they are more open to participate in class. Due to this, I started talking to them about our class, listening to them, sharing experiences, and the students started talking about themselves more openly. At least the relationship between my students and I improved and the result was moments of conscious learning.

One day, my students were agitated and impatient and wanted me to finish the class as soon as possible. I calmed down and asked them why they were so nervous. They told me that they had to finish a research assignment the History teacher had asked them to do. Some students commented that it was a boring activity and not interesting. Others said that it didn't have anything to do with their History lessons, and so on... I just listened to them. Afterwards I told them to finish my activity and then I let themselves to finish the History work. The English class finished, and I let them do their activities of History. In the next week, I was in the teachers' room and the teachers were complaining about their students' research assignments, and this intrigued me a little. I listened to the teachers' claims and tried to understand them. They complained that some students' work was simply a copy of a text while others were copies from the internet and that some students didn't do anything.

After listening to my colleagues, I began to think about research assignments and what they were. I thought that they must be something hard to be done. Kids from 6th grade are used to cutting and pasting pictures on their notebooks like they did in the previous grades - that was the experience they had of doing research. Sometimes they had their parents help them do it. From this moment on, I started to realize that 6th graders were expected to do a different kind of research work and that they were not aware of this.

The next year, I decided to do a post- graduation course at PUC to get in touch with English and with more updated methodology. My intention was to acquire knowledge in the field so as to be able to offer my students, and myself, more satisfactory classes. During the amazing classes I had, the ones that seemed to captivate me and respond to my worries and desire to teach in a more significant way, were Issues in Research Methodology, Exploratory Practice and Reflective Practice. All of them have contributed to my work because they were related to the ideas which had been turning on in my mind.

As the classes moved on and the readings were being done, the ideas discussed in the texts and in the course cohered with my concerns at school. Some of the discussions which happened in the course gave me new insights about my teaching, and its development. I learned how to listen to my students efficiently, accurately and coherently. During Issues in Research Methodology, we learned some aspects about research that fascinated me. Especially because some students

and co-workers of mine had been complaining about research and its difficulties and I had seen this problem from students' and teachers' perspectives and also from my own perspective.

As I was studying issues in research methodologies, I learned how I should do research and how I should help my students to do theirs. Consequently, I started reflecting about all the problems we, as students, face when we are asked to do research which we were never taught how to do. I could understand the difficulties students would face, mainly, because I was in the same position. Afterwards, I acquired another level of understanding when I studied Exploratory Practice. If the course on Issues in Research Methodology made me experience students' frustration and difficulties, Exploratory Practice, on the other hand, came as an approach to help me overcome these problems. It showed me some strategies which can be applied in class to help bring discussion about the issues that emerge when we plan to do research. This study has been helping me to understand how to allow my students work autonomously and this has helped them feel more self-confident. As a result, I came up with the interesting idea of writing about doing research in elementary school for my monograph. First, because I knew very little about what research might mean for elementary school students, and also because I could make it gain more significance to me and my students who would also be doing it. So, I am fascinated about doing and writing about research based on Exploratory Practice – an approach that doesn't exclude the students from the learning process but counts on them as the ones who are able to learn and make decisions about their learning.

Furthermore, in this perspective, teachers help students to build their learning consciously and autonomously, while teachers have a chance to conduct his/her class in a more participative way, respecting students' individuality. Here, teachers are practitioners who will be attentive to the ways students learn and how they can help them reflect about their own learning. And, above all, to consider that some of these students have already been thinking about their learning but haven't had an opportunity to share this with teachers and colleagues, because we are not aware of their awareness of it.

My desire is still the original one: to know more in order to provide my students and myself classes which make sense for all of us.

On the whole, I am pretty sure that it is just one more step that I am taking toward my development and as consequently my improvement, it is just one step into trying to understand and think about my concerns related to the kind of teaching I intend to practice. I really hope to find some answers to my questions but, above of all, I hope to get more questions to be asked by doing this monograph. As I write about how I got here, I dare say that it is not an end yet, but a continuous journey with a temporary stop to get to know more, to understand more and to reach somewhere. Although it is still not clear to me, I feel somehow that it is there waiting to be reached, discussed, and broadcast.

This work is an attempt to understand, to discuss, and to transmit that research is a magnificent tool for our students, once we help them do it consciously and being able to discuss with them about it, so as to help them find their own learning motivation. Above all, we believe in our potential and in our responsibility as teachers who are able to provide the awareness of teaching and learning for all of us, in all aspects of our life. I hope that this work of mine can contribute to teachers and students as I it contributed to me, to what I chose to do since life gave me the gift of being a teacher.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I will explain the assumptions and approaches I adopted to interpret the collected data. This research aims to show, through the lenses of Exploratory Practice, students and teacher as research practitioners.

Exploratory Practice, according to Hanks (2017, p.1), foregrounds the importance of why questions; puzzling, being puzzled, and puzzlement; and acknowledges that exploring such puzzles (as learners, teacher educators, and researchers) aids our understanding of issues relevant to our language learning and teaching. Yet, Hanks (2017, p.2) emphasizes that “EP is a form of practitioner research in which learners, as well as teachers, are encouraged to investigate their own learning/teaching practice, while currently practicing the target language.”

Agreeing with Hanks (2017, p.7), I believe that EP is a way of being more human, in order to be open to listen to learners, to discuss teaching situations which need attention, to promote in learners and teachers the process of being aware of the implications of some behavior in class and the assumptions adopted. It is a direct channel of communication between teacher and learners, which removes barriers and hierarchies, and it is a great reminder that the best learning is mutual, open to discuss things that might not immediately make sense, but that puzzle you. It is also, according to Hanks (2017, p.4), a willingness to admit you don’t (or) should not have all answers, but that looking for them and reflecting on them is a valuable process in and on itself.

3.1 –EXPLORATORY PRACTICE AND THE FIVE LEARNERS’ PROPOSITIONS

Five learners’ propositions are presented by Allwright & Hanks (2009, p.5) to deeply conceptualize learners as key practitioners of learning.

Proposition 1: Learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own idiosyncratic ways.

Everyone has a way of acquiring, understanding, reflecting upon what is experienced. Learning is an internal process - that is why it differs from one person to another. The time necessary for one learner to acquire what is being taught is not the same for all learners.

Considering this proposition and the curriculum which teachers are bound to follow, it is probable that the curricular contents are not able to cover the particular needs of each learner. Unfortunately, it is still hard for teachers not to operate in a standardized way in institutions that remain irreducible to this conception of learning. According to Allwright & Hanks (2009, p.9) “standardization means treating all learners in the same way in very important aspects – with the same curriculum and same examination and so on.”

Endorsing the same point of view, Gilbert (2004a, 5, apud ALLWRIGHT & HANKS, 2009, p.9) calls the attention to the pressure put on teachers to reach good results. According to him, teachers are bullied by management, in many schools, if they don’t meet the wished target. He admits that, although schools may reach the successful goal, it might not do us any good in the long-term and, consequently, the obsession with results is causing us to miss the point of education entirely.

Confirming this, Breen (2006, p.206-7 apud ALLWRIGHT & HANKS, 2009, p. 8) assumes that “governments have mobilized standards of achievement and competencies in education, the accountability of educators and the new rationalism of ‘evidence-based’ practices.”

Prabhu (1987, p.106 apud ALLWRIGHT & HANKS, 2009, p. 8), also against such ideology, claimed that “a good system of education is the one in which teachers operate with a sense of plausibility about whatever procedures they choose to adopt.”

Plausibility is sometimes badly interpreted by school management, as it is seen as a loose way of teaching and as not being able to reach the goal as time-management determined.

Considering all that was discussed above, it may be assumed that standardization goes against Proposition 1, which claims for a more idiosyncratic vision of the way learners learn. Tudor (2001; p.14 apud ALLWRIGHT & HANKS,2009, p.9), affirms the need to accommodate this uniqueness, and, in this way, learners' identities in our pedagogical actions and choices.

Although the system of education focuses on schools to obtain better results in a standardized way, it is important to highlight that teachers claim for a more flexible and open curriculum which assists students in their political and ideological diversity, as well as their cultural plurality.

As an attempt to solve, or at least to diminish the problem of having the same curricula, PCN (Brazilian Curricular Parameters), a Brazilian document which guides the way education might be treated, empowers the teacher with a more flexible way of teaching, allowing them to choose an adequate curriculum.

For the curricula, in addition to referring to the content programs of each discipline, they should be flexible to promote discussions and re-elaborations when carried out in the classroom, since it is the teacher who concretizes them. (PCN, 1998)

On the whole, in order to respect the idiosyncratic way that learners acquire their knowledge, the curriculum as well as the activities proposed in class, must take into account the diversity that is encountered in the classroom. This diversity is related to the learners who differ among them, because they have their own way of understanding and feeling what they experience. Another aspect to be considered is that the social context in which the students are immersed might interfere with their choices and decisions towards their own learning.

Proposition 2: Learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment.

Vygotsky's interactionist theory praises social interaction for the learning and for the development of learners. Yet, according to this author's theory, learning precedes development. So, by interacting socially, learners enlarge their cultural and linguistic repertoire which allows them to perform the knowledge acquired in a variety of situations. In addition to this, Vygotsky (1978, p.83) said that "the knowledge acquired in one particular context is used by the learners in a variety of situations regardless of whether it occurs in the same occasion or not. This capability of adapting what is learned is built by learners since they were babies". Although learners learn by their living experience in interaction with others, they still decide and choose the way this acquired knowledge will be managed.

According to Vygotsky's theory, once the learners are exposed to their environment, which may be outside the classroom (their environment, their family, their friends, their social experience, their economic life, their community and so on) and inside (their classmates, teachers and all the school staff), it influences the learners' development. That is why, a mutually collegial learning process in the classroom must be encouraged and seen as an opportunity for learners to deal with different interpretations and problems-solving.

Furthermore, from this interaction with the social environment, learners learn some social aspects that are important for social life. The rules that control and manage the habits built socially are under the judgment of the coercive power which inhibits to break some social rules. As Allwright & Hanks (2009, p.5) said, "So, learners are not entirely free agents. The presence of others constrains what they can do in the classroom".

Learners go to class having the notion of some social rules which were learned in a different environment: their families, their communities, and so on. As a result, they know the acceptable and non-acceptable behavior before others.

At school, children start having their first everyday social contact with the others (classmates) who are at the same level of maturity but are not members of their family. This experience brings some positive aspects for them to grow and develop. Children are exposed to some conflicts, with which they have to learn how to cope, and even overcome some experiences that were hard for them to live.

There, at school, they also have to adapt themselves to school rules and this prepares them for social life.

Proposition 3: Learners are capable of taking learning seriously.

In order to understand this proposition, I dare say that it is highly necessary to reflect on “taking something seriously”. Reflecting on this sentence stimulates us to think of different characteristics which empower learners to take learning seriously. Among thousands which could be enlisted are curiosity, interest, enthusiasm, usefulness, and meaningfulness.

Some researchers have already diagnosed that curiosity enhances the learning process.

It's no secret that curiosity makes learning more effective and enjoyable. Curious students not only ask questions but also actively seek out the answers. Without curiosity, Sir Isaac Newton would have never formulated the laws of physics, Alexander Fleming probably wouldn't have discovered penicillin, and Marie Curie's pioneering research on radioactivity may not exist. (STENGER, 2014, p.17)

All these famous people took what they were doing seriously because they were motivated in doing it. Curiosity drove them to these findings. The same occurs when learners take what they are learning seriously. But the challenge is to pursue what can inspire learners, what their interests are, what would be reasonable to be taught, who these learners are and what they want to pursue in their lives.

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. (Einstein, Albert 1955, p.62)

Learning needs to be accepted and desired by learners so that they feel enthusiasm in learning or in taking part in the learning. Due to the sense of usefulness which learning offers, they feel that what they are learning is meaningful to their lives.

Concerning this issue, Schulman (1999, p.2) in an AAHE National Conference on Higher Education in Washington, DC, explained that “it is important to understand that learners construct meaning out of their prior understanding, that any new learning must somehow connect to what learners

already know.” The author added that this means what he calls as “getting the inside out.” As he said, “we as teachers must discover ways of getting the inside out looking jointly to their knowledge with our students and taking seriously what they already know and believe.”

Learners are not an empty box waiting to be filled, neither a blank sheet which is there waiting to be written. On the contrary, they are longing for learning and sharing what they have learned in interaction with others.

Another point is to understand and see learners as serious people who are capable of taking responsibilities for their own learning. As Allwright & Hanks (2009, pp.5, 6) said, if we desire learners to take their learning seriously, we as teachers must take learners as serious persons as well.

In these terms, learners cannot be under teachers’ judgment based on teachers’ belief which was acquired through time and it is, most of the time, tendentious to imply that by learners’ behavior it is possible to predict whether they are or they are not taking their learning seriously. It is worth remembering that learners are individuals with their own individuality, personality, and proper character.

Proposition 4: Learners are capable of independent decision-making.

This proposition assumes learners as individuals who have their opinion, their judgment over the things they experience or desire

Allwright & Hanks (2009, p.6) comment that “key practitioners are not precisely told what to do, when to do it, how to do it, and who to do it with.” In addition to this, Allwright & Hanks regret that the traditional way of learning, to which learners are exposed, does not enable them to develop and apply their decisions.

Since language classes around the world are based on language curricula, syllabuses, textbooks, and lesson plans and they all tend to suppress space for learners to take their own idiosyncratic decisions about what to learn, when to learn, how to learn and who to learn with. Moreover, the judgment that teachers have on learners as not being capable of independent decision-making, lies on this strict view that learners must receive their learning disregarding their individualities and opinions about what is been taught to them.

Proposition 5: Learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning.

Summing up all propositions, it is highly noted the importance of understanding learners' capabilities in doing things in an idiosyncratic way and with great responsibility, counting on their decision making, and their performance in building their learning in a mutually supportive environment. It is highly important to emphasize that the notion of learners here include also teachers, directors, researchers and local community. In conclusion, whoever is capable to reflect upon learning.

According to Hanks, (2017, p. 1) "Exploratory Practice is an approach which emerged due to the claim that research into classroom language learning and teaching should be participatory, egalitarian, and empowering." Although it may be unclear how to achieve these aims, practitioner research has been increasingly recognized as a force for developing an understanding of educational processes and practices.

This approach puts learners as the agents of the work for understanding. However, for this to happen, it is necessary to analyze the way we assume that learners are, due to the fact that the judgment that is made can destroy or construct a successful and enjoyable learning environment for everyone. We need to assume that this "success" is not only measured by the learner's grade and the teacher's achieved results, but by the emancipatory learning and teaching process developed in a class by teachers and learners as practitioners of learning and teaching.

3.2 – EXPLORATORY PRACTICE AND THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES

Exploratory Practice (EP) does not prescribe procedures to be developed. According to Allwright & Hanks (2001, p.159), it is far from intending to use technical procedures for its development, but ethical and epistemological considerations. Due to this, as an endeavor of finding ways of applying an inclusive practitioner research in the classroom, seven principles are proposed.

1. Put "quality of life" first
2. Work primarily to understand classroom language learning
3. Work for mutual development
4. Work to bring people together (collegiality)

5. Involve everybody (inclusivity)
6. Make the work a continuous enterprise
7. Integrate the work for understanding into “existing curricular practices” (minimize the burden, maximize sustainability)

Allwright & Hanks (2009, p.149) affirm that the first principle is “to focus on quality of life” which is, for language learners and teachers, the most central concern for EP as practitioner research in our field. The second principle, “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”.

As an attempt to seek the understanding of the term “quality of life”, a definition will be used to illustrate the idea it implies.

Quality of life (QOL) is the general well-being of individuals and societies, outlining negative and positive features of life. It observes life satisfaction, including everything from physical health, family, education, employment, wealth, safety, security to freedom, religious beliefs, and the environment.

(Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

According to this definition, it embraces the social and ethical context of individuals in society. When thinking of “quality”, what comes up to our mind the idea of having something positive in potential, a good performance or a good product to be consumed, a good material, and good work. But such definition also affirms that it outlines positive and negative aspects of life, which alludes to critical thinking about life and lived experiences. Classroom involves learners and teachers in relation to a variety of teaching and learning issues.

However, quality of life is a term that is employed in many technical fields with the idea of “being well”, “doing well”, and when related to pedagogical issues, it wouldn’t be different. Because it is the work performed, the goal achieved and much more, it is the way, the path to this achievement is built. In Exploratory Practice, whatever these issues and their themes are, they are exposed as puzzles that will be brought out as an endeavor of understanding through practitioners’ (students and teachers) interactions.

Quality of life, when referring to the classroom, are the characteristics lived and experienced by students and teachers. EP seeks to understand this

quality by monitoring the classroom as a place where the work done provides reflections upon the life that both learners and teachers live, inside and outside of school.

As Hanks (2017, p. 99) said: “Teachers and learners working together can access powerful insights into classroom language learning life.”

Classroom life is also related to enjoyment, pleasure in teaching as Michael Joseph’s idea cited by Allwright & Hanks (2001, p.1) commented, ‘Teaching must first of all be good for teachers because if it isn’t then it won’t be much good for learners anyway.’

The third principle says that everyone needs to be involved in the work for understanding. As Allwright & Hanks (2009, p.151) suggest, “everyone should have the opportunity of reaching whatever level of understanding they are capable of, however “deep” or “shallow” that may be.”

The fourth principle says that the work needs to serve to bring people together. And the fifth principle states that the work needs to be conducted in a spirit of mutual development.

The concern of being together, approximating people in a more integrated way, allows for interaction and mutual exchange. Since the puzzles may refer to a situation which came from the group that wanted to reach understandings, the ideas and points of view that emerge by getting learners and teachers to articulate a variety of levels of understandings.

Understanding needs to be shared - this opportunity is for all without exclusion. Teachers are not the only ones who hold the power of knowledge, everyone is capable of taking responsibility of the learning process. Practitioners of learning and teaching are open to negotiate assumptions, beliefs, ideas, and, by doing this, make an attempt to reach understandings together.

The sixth principle gives a deep importance to the idea of understanding in the perspective of Exploratory Practice: “Working for understanding is necessarily a continuous enterprise.” (ALLWRIGHT & HANKS, 2009, p.153)

According to Allwright and Hanks (2009, p. 153), life is continuous and dynamic. Our understanding is therefore always going to be provisional, at best, and valid only briefly, if at all.

In agreement with this, the research proposed by EP is the one which focuses on understanding rather than planning for outcomes. It proposes that this

dynamic of life demands a continuous persecution of understanding what is around, inside, and outside of the classroom. It is far from saying that outcome somehow is not reached, but in fact, by thinking in order to get understanding on issues, the learning process is effective among teachers and learners as practitioners, as the awareness of the situation that is being inquired might produce in all participants a change of thought and behavior toward the matter.

The last principle, the seventh one, according to Allwright and Hanks (2009, p.154) is: “Integrating the work for understanding fully into existing curricular practices is a way of minimizing the burden and maximizing sustainability.” The work done in class needs to be related to the problem, the situation or issue which teachers and learners are intrigued by and are seeking for understanding. But such work for understanding must be continuous, must be part of the everyday classes. Understanding is a continuous enterprise because it is not possible to reach levels of understandings by just monitoring. It must be a routine because it needs to be inserted in the teachers’ and learners’ work in the classroom in order to become a natural way of working for understanding.

As reported by Allwright (2009, p.154), “The main aim of Exploratory Practice is to use class time to deepen understandings of what language learning involves.”

Puzzles, as a continuous process of inquiries upon an issue, and potentially exploited pedagogic activities (PEPAs) maximize the sustainability of doing research to understand life in the classroom, and to empower teachers and learners as active practitioners. A PEPA is a normal activity that is slightly adapted to investigate or to try to deal with the puzzle that needs to be understood. By working with this activity, a teacher develops strategies to try to understand the issue which intrigues someone or everybody in the classroom. Such practice enables learners and teachers to achieve a better understanding upon a chosen situation. This practice must be reinforced and applied as it is part of the class, without excluding the plan that teachers are bound to follow.

Exploratory Practice works with puzzles rather than problems because it faces inquiries as learning opportunities for all participants, whoever they are - teachers, learners, supervisors, principals, communities party and etc.. - to get understandings upon the issues in the puzzles.

The classroom situation is not seen as a negative issue to be discussed and fixed, but it is seen as an opportunity to bring out discussions in order to promote and develop learners and teachers as practitioners, through different levels of understanding.

Although awareness rather than changes are the focus of this approach, it is worthwhile bearing in mind that the process of being puzzled or puzzling takes learners and teachers to changes.

3.3 REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

In their initial careers, teachers are immature and lack experience, but even though they might face situations which they are not ready to deal with. On the other hand, they are more enthusiastic about what they are doing because it is something new. As time goes by, teachers tend to think about their classes because, as it is part of their routine, some observations and discussions about learners' behavior, class conditions, material used, the way learning occurs or the lack of it in some moment (in the perspective of the teacher) tend to emerge and be discussed with teachers' co-workers. It is natural, it is part of the process of growing in any professional career.

The process of thinking is a key word for Reflective Teaching because to think critically is not an impulsive action; it is a result of the reflections about one's action. Reflective Teaching is brought to this work because it is relevant to think about the act of teaching once it is part of what we, teachers, do in life. It is quite normal that teachers tend to think about an occurrence, a problem or an event they deal with during their teaching practice.

As Zeichner & Liston (1996, p.8) said; [...] "the process of reflection for teachers begins when they experience a difficulty, troublesome event, or experience that cannot be immediately resolved."

However, not all thinking about teaching constitutes an act of reflective teaching. That is the point that needs to be understood. The thinking that is necessary to improve our quality of teaching and learning is the one which demands observation, not only because there was an event or a problem, but mainly because it must be a conscious practice in the everyday classroom life.

To better display the idea of a reflective teacher, Zeichner & Liston (1996, p.1) argue: “If a teacher never questions the goals and the values that guide his or her work, the context in which he or she teaches, or never examines his or her assumptions, then it is our belief that this individual is not engaged in reflective teaching.”

Teachers who behave as reflective practitioners think about the action of teaching in order to improve their classes and their own work, they think critically about the curriculum, the way this curriculum is addressed and for whom it is delivered, proposing changes where necessary.

Reflective Teaching lies on the development of reflective action in which teachers and student teachers collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices and use information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching.

This approach is interested in the development of the teacher as a reflective practitioner. This means that these teachers are able to question their own teaching.

In asking and answering questions which came from facing teaching situation, teachers are in a position to evaluate their teaching, deciding if aspects of their own teaching could be changed, to develop strategies for change, and to monitor the effects of implementing these strategies. (RICHARD & LOCKHART, 1994, p.2)

Reflective Practice emerged to empower reflection among teachers over their teaching practice. That is why the analysis of the data I collected will be supported by such approach with the intention of showing my own gradual evolution into being a reflective teacher.

Furthermore, Reflective Practice is a critical approach which stimulates teachers to think over what they do in their class and the way they do it. The goal in this approach is to provide teachers to think as professionals and plan strategies to improve their work by creating new forms of understanding and acting.

It is not only learners that develop themselves in the learning process, but teachers who are also committed to what they do in class, teachers who feel that there is always something more to be improved, to be enriched, to be done or even to think of removing some habits which do not contribute to their work.

Within this perspective, teachers who think about their own teaching process, who are worried about what they do and the way it is done, are reflective teachers.

As Zeichner & Liston, (1996) say, “We believe that as teachers, it is through reflection on our teaching that we become more skilled, more capable, and in general better teachers.”

Furthermore, reflective teaching takes into account the social conditions in which schools, learners and teachers are submitted. Considering that, it’s assumed that families, communities are part of the process of conveying and building beliefs and ideas that will base attitudinal choices in the face of a situation and a problem of one’s person.

Since the principal proposal of Reflective Practice is the action of thinking in order to plan and then act, it is necessary to understand that, although thinking is an act that is particular and depends on one’s point of view, it is impregnated with concepts and theories constructed in the social context of individual thinking. When such action of thinking happens, automatically the beliefs and orientations around the issue vary from one’s perspective to others. Thus, teachers can pose in a very different way before a teaching situation. According to Zeichner & Liston (1996, p.2) [...] “teachers can develop their work as a technician teacher or a reflective practitioner teacher. The difference is the way teachers see and work with a given teaching situation.”

Teachers as reflective practitioners reflect about their environment and critically question their own work, assumptions, beliefs, and orientation in order to find a way to develop their work, as well as themselves, providing a better teaching environment for learners.

Viewing teachers as reflective practitioners assumes that teachers can both pose and solve problems relate to their educational practice. Daily, hourly, even minute by minute, teachers attempt to solve problems that arise in the classroom. The way in which they solve those problems is affected by how they pose or “frame” the problem. Reflective teachers think both about how they frame and then how to solve the problem at hand. (ZEICHNER & LISTON, 1996, p.4)

Dewey (1933, apud ZEICHNER & LISTON 1996 p. 8-9) explained that some problems and troublesome events experienced by teachers cannot be

immediately resolved. Hugh and Tom Russell (1990, apud ZEICHNER & LISTON 1996, p.9) refer to these situations as puzzles of practice, and that teachers facing an uneasy situation step back in order to analyse their experience. This step back can occur in the midst of the action or after the action is completed. For this work, it is important to understand the difference between routine action and reflective action which both based on Dewey's explanation.

3.4 –DEWEY AND REFLECTIVE ACTION

It is important to emphasize that Dewey, (cited by ZEICHNER & LISTON, 1996 p. 9), makes a distinction between the action which is routine and the action which is reflective.

Routine action is guided by impulse, tradition and authority while the reflective action involves active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or practice in light of the reasons that support it and the further consequences to which it leads, this is holistic way of meeting and responding to problems, a way of being as a teacher.

Teachers are not able to control everything that is about to happen in class, their attitude before an unexpected situation tends to be instinctive. It is not possible to settle a series of steps to be followed when some problems are faced in class. However, a teacher who reflects about his/her own teaching will think about what happened in the class that intrigued him/her and then will think about it in order to find ways to improve his/her own work for better teaching/learning.

Reflective practice is indispensable to face the teaching process as an effort to improving the conditions of learner's learning when we reflect about students in our classrooms, we need to listen to and accept many sources of understanding. These sources are heads, hearts, our reasoning capacities, and our emotional insights. In reflective action, in contrast to routine action, reason and emotion are engaged. (ZEICHNER AND LISTON, 1996, p. 9)

It is important to understand that teachers deal with learners who come to the classroom bringing with them a cultural experience obtained from living in their communities, their social groups and their families. So, a reflective action demands that the teacher takes into account the learners' background. These learners, as any normal human beings, have their frustrations, their dreams, their likes and their dislikes. Due to this, to be a reflective teacher demands an awareness reflection, so as to understand who these learners are, where they come from, what their realities are. Routine action and mechanical focus on the procedures of work may disregard the intellectual, emotional and social background of learners. In fact, learners are thought to get their grades, to be committed to their studies without taking into consideration if such studies

collaborate to their growth as social human beings. On the other hand, reflective action is engaged in the social aspect where these learners are inserted, their reality and social background.

3.5 DEWEY'S THREE ATTITUDES FOR BEING A REFLECTIVE TEACHER.

Dewey (1933 apud ZEICHNER& LISTON, 1996 p.8) elected three attitudes that are integral to reflective action: openmindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness.

These attitudes are being brought to this paper in order to explain and better show the way reflective practice pauses before teachers and learners' puzzlements. According to Dewey, this comes from the process of teachers experiencing difficulties, troublesome events, or an experience that cannot be immediately resolved.

Open mindedness helps one listen to more than one side, to give attention to alternative possibilities, and to recognize the possibility of error. A reflective teacher is the one who continues analyzing the rationales that underlie what is taken as natural and right. Reflective teachers examine all the parts of the situation, in order to seek for the most reasonable answer or attitude toward it. And they are able to give a step back if it is needed. Teachers in this context ask themselves the reasons why they do what they do.

Responsibility is related to the consequences that every action involves. Here, teachers are worried about what they do, how they do, and what they do, in order to analyze the utility of doing things to promote learners' development.

As Zeichner & Liston (1996, p.11) pointed out, responsibility involves three kinds of consequences:

- (a) personal consequences – the effects of one's teaching on learners.
- (b) academic consequences – the effects of one's teaching on learners' intellectual development.
- And (c) social and political consequences – the projected effects of ones teaching on the life chances of various pupils.

The third attitude is wholeheartedness and it suggests that teachers who are compromised to examine their own assumptions and beliefs, and the results of

their actions approach all situations with the attitude that they can learn something new. They can investigate the way their teaching impacts students and make an effort to see the situation from a different perspective.

3.6 REFLECTION-ON-ACTION AND REFLECTION-IN-ACTION

Teachers think about their lessons plans, about the subject they are about to present to their students, about learners and things they have done, and things they will be supposed to do in class. These moments of thinking are natural because teaching demands teachers to pause and reflect upon their own work. According to Schon (1983, apud ZEICHNER & LISTON, 1996 p. 14) “such reflections can be seen in two frames, reflections can occur after or before an action. In teaching, Reflection-on -action occurs before a lesson when we plan for and think about our lesson and after instruction when we consider what occurred.”

This teaching reflection-on-action might be seen in teachers’ room when teachers share their experiences with their co-workers, coordinators and principals, or even when they are planning their lessons, or reframing a lesson or thinking about a situation that claims for their interference. Such reflections occur before and after teaching and they bring new insights to teachers who reflect about their own teaching.

Schon, (1983) cited by Zeichner & Liston (1996) adds that reflection also occurs during the action as well. It is when teachers, as he said, “have reflective conversations with the situations while they are engaged in their effort.”

Thus, as Schon (1983) explains “reflection-in-action can be portrayed when a teacher is dealing with an expected learner reaction or perception, and this teacher makes adjustments and gives instructions taking into account a reaction.”

While the reflection-on-action is somehow planned before, or thought after, reflection-in-action deals with expected situations that teachers who, although are not taught immediately how to deal with, do base their actions on their own practice.

Some of the actions that teachers do in class come from their practice and their experience, without ignoring the importance of the theories which help teachers broaden their point of view and their repertoire toward the teaching practice. We are considering that somehow this practice is valuable because they are part of the process of a teacher who reflects.

According to Schon, as practitioners continue to reflect in and on action and to learn from their practice, the process of reflection spirals through stages of appreciation, action, and reappreciation. Practitioners interpret and frame (appreciate) their experiences through the repertoires of

values, knowledge, theories, and practices that they bring to the experiences. (ZEICHNER & LISTON, 1996, p. 16)

Thus, practice and theory are important for a reflective teacher, because teachers during their practice acquire experience and knowledge by doing and by experiencing expected and unexpected situations. In addition to this, the theory incorporated in their doing gives them a deeper insight and a different perspective to the situations that teachers encounter in the classroom every day.

Finally, this approach enriches this work because it lights up the conception of a teacher who reflects critically upon what is done in class. Such approach also portrays that reflections occur before, after and during the action, which for this work has great impact because all the data and activities proposed here came from reflecting. Such reflections were acquired by sharing such ideas with other professors.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will describe the research approaches and paradigm adopted and I will justify this adoption. I will also present a description of the participants and the school where the research was conducted.

4.1 THE APPROACHES AND THE PARADIGM

The work presented is based on a qualitative research paradigm. The data was collected while the learners, acting as research practitioners, prepared posters and took part in reflexive classroom activities, according to Reflective Practice and Exploratory Practice principles. Reflective Practice is brought to this work in order to emphasize the importance of the action of thinking systematically toward the teachers' work in the classroom, and how it affects learners and teachers' work. I have the belief that by thinking and considering the actions applied in class or actions that are thought of being applied, teachers and learners initiate the process of getting awareness about what they do in class, how it is done and, consequently, why it is or not done. It is a calling, it is a first sign that evokes learners and teachers, even without intention, to start to develop as practitioners.

The approaches were chosen when I was studying research methodology at PUC/RIO and I was encouraged to think about what puzzles I would like to investigate to try to understand my classes and my students. Since then, I started thinking about what my puzzle would be and I decided to investigate: "Why do some of my sixth grades students face some difficulties in doing research?"

In order to answer such question, the background of the students was taken into account, so as to help understand the reasons that lead students to feel unmotivated to do the research that they have been assigned. The data was collected while the learners and the teacher prepared posters and took part in reflexive classroom activities.

It is important to emphasize that Reflective Practice was used in order to show the importance of being a reflective teacher, and the contributions it brings to this work. This approach illustrates the students' and the teacher's reflective action, in the moment of the research, during and after the teaching action. Reflective Practice here is mentioned to display my development during the activities proposed as a reflective practitioner. My diary entries are used to portray such development.

Meanwhile, Exploratory Practice is applied in order to analyze the data collected matching the work done in class to the five propositions which guide and describe learners and teachers as key practitioners. It is also the approach which contributes to the development of teachers and learners to think about what is happening in the classroom so that all involved in the process of learning can provide their understanding about a specific situation faced by the group.

Due to the fact that the research will be local and directed to a specific group, the paradigm applied here is constructivist (RICHARDS 2003, p.38) The research is local and the methodology is constructing intelligibility about a context, by establishing rapport with the research participants.

As a consequence, the data and the conclusion of this research is not to be conceived in a wide and spread way, but in fact it was the result and the conclusion reached regarding a certain group, whose data collected may not represent other similar groups.

It is equally important to point out that all who had directly and indirectly participated in this work were not obliged to do so, just those who felt willing to participate. I hope to have conducted a democratic research, positioning myself against the idea of treating human beings as a means to achieve other person's aims.

4.2 THE GROUP, THE LOCAL AND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT.

The public school where I work and I did the research is in Nova Iguaçu, Cabuçu District. Most of the inhabitants are of low income who work downtown and come home at night. It is a small district that lacks pavement, hospital, basic sanitation, in some regions, mainly those that are near the school.

The learners who took part in this research are from this public school, aged between 11 to 13 years old. They are in the 6th grade and most of them just have a formal way of learning English at the school, the majority of the students do not have English at English courses.

In this class there are 40 to 45 learners and I am their English teacher. We have classes once a week from 7:00 to 8:40 am. Most students are from low income families, some live near the school but others need to take a bus to come. Although most of them

are very agitated in class they are very participative and keep a good interaction with one another.

Although the public system adopted an English book, I decided not to use it because there are no books for all learners. So, my classes always had worksheets prepared by me, following the curriculum and adequate to their age and grade.

5. A DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITIES

The classroom can be a very difficult environment sometimes. All teachers have had, at least once, a class which they could classify as “tough to teach there” for numerous reasons.

It is paramount to establish a good atmosphere in the classroom so that teaching and learning are enjoyable, for both teachers and students. However, to achieve this is not easy. There is no recipe to be given but somehow, reflections about teaching and who is involved in this process can help teachers deal better with some problems faced in class. Reflecting to understand a problematic situation and its causes can provide interaction among learners and teachers in the process of learning.

In my professional life as a teacher, I have been struggling with my students' lack of motivation to do some activities in which some research was demanded. Thus, I decided to provide activities in which the research would be done in class since, when they were assigned as homework, the students did not do them. The reasons they used to give were many: “*I don't know how to research*”, “*Where is it, teacher?*”, “*I don't understand English, teacher!*” and so on.

Based on these arguments, I decided to try other ways of working. So, the first activity I planned was the one covering the use of the Present Continuous Tense.

I intended to verify if I could help them to do an activity by checking what they had in their notebooks and sheets that I had given to them before. In doing so, I would be showing them that it is necessary to review lessons in order to understand and answer the exercises proposed.

5.1 THE FIRST ACTIVITY: DEVELOPING RESEARCH IN CLASS.

Firstly, I brought to class some pictures and exposed them on the board. In these pictures, there were some characters doing an action. In order to help the students, understand that such action was happening in that moment, I wrote the date on the board explaining that the actions were occurring on that date.

The pictures presented some characters doing activities like: drinking, eating, watching, and so on. I asked them to take a look at the pictures and tell each other what the people were doing. The first step was to ask them to remember how the verb “to be” is conjugated. They showed difficulties to remember it, so I asked them to look it up in their material, because I had already provided them with this information. Some of them found but other did not. So, I suggested that they could check in their notebooks and write it on the board. The first problem was who would write it. Finally, Lucas offered himself to do. As I wanted them to feel and experience how to do research, I just made some interferences in the form of questions: “Who would come and conjugate the verb “to be” on the board?”

Lucas came and wrote “AM” and I asked the class whether it was right or wrong. They checked their notebooks, and some said it was wrong, while others said it was right. Then I pointed out that first we needed to know what personal pronoun we were referring to. And after that we could conjugate the verb “to be”. A student said: I know this one is followed by I. I said that it is correct, and I helped Lucas to organize the board in order to have a column in English and a column in Portuguese because they started showing some confusion to identify the meaning of the personal pronouns. So, due to this, the personal pronouns were translated into Portuguese so that the students could use them properly, as well as the verb “to be”.

The content on the left side of the board presented the personal pronouns followed by their translation in Portuguese and, listed beside them, the verb “to be” which was translated into Portuguese as the verb “estar” (because the sentences that these students were going to do would use the verb “to be” with the meaning of “estar” and not as “ser”).

During the time they were developing the diagram, I helped them, and I made some interferences explaining what they were saying and what Lucas was writing. Some observations are important to be made:

The asterisk* was put here to show that although such pronouns refer to the singular, their verbs are irregular and different: “I am”, but not “I is”, “she is” but never “she am” or “he am”. Another explanation given was that the pronoun “I” is always written in capital letter while the verb “to be” is written in lower case.

The pronouns “he” and “she” were followed by masculine and feminine proper names so that students would understand that we can replace the pronoun “HE” by Paul or Peter and the pronoun “SHE” by Anne, Emily and so on... They were told to use the same form of the verb “to be” for a masculine or a feminine proper name. On the other hand, the pronoun “THEY” is used to give the idea of two or more people, things and animals. So, that’s why “Mary and John” were written beside this personal pronoun.

However, I kept the way they wrote on the board to register their work and to do my analysis. The board was divided in four columns. The first one for the pronouns in English and the second one for the translations of the personal pronoun in Portuguese. The third column presented the form of the verb “to be” and the fourth column showed the translation of this verb.

Table 1: The left part of the board.






The pronouns	The translation in Portuguese	The verb to be (estar)	Translation
*I	Eu	Am	Estou
You	Você	Are	Está
*He	Ele (Paul, Peter)	is	Está
*She	Ela (Anne, Emily)	is	Está
It	Isso /isto	is	Está
We	Nós	Are	Estamos
You	Vocês	Are	São
They	Eles / elas (Mary and John)	are	Estão

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On the right side of the board, there were pictures of people doing things. I told the students to look at them and say the sentences using the present continuous tense. They started saying drinking, eating, watching in Portuguese. Then I presented the verbs in English - reading, writing, eating, drinking, watching, and doing - in order to have them saying again, this time in English. They checked the board and started with the personal pronoun followed by its correct verb “to be”, and then they chose the verb that fitted the action the person was doing. The first sentence sounded like this: “Lucas (pause) is (pause) study (pause) and then they corrected saying “studying”. Lucas, one

of the cleverest students, wrote these sentences on the board. The adverb of time “now” came along in the sentences giving the idea of the “exact moment” as chosen by them. Thus, the sentences produced by them are in the box below. They were displayed in the same way they appeared on the board.

Table 2: The right side of the board

 <p>a) Lucas is studying now.</p>	 <p>b) Thalita and Kailane are talking now.</p>	 <p>c) Emily is washing now.</p>
 <p>d) We are watching now.</p>	 <p>e) I am listening now.</p>	

This first part of the lesson functioned as a warm-up to the activity to be proposed. After this warm-up they organized themselves in groups or in pairs and I gave them a variety of pictures with people doing things like: eating, drinking, speaking and so on... They had to write sentences following what we had done on the board and also paste the pictures on a poster. Immediately they started doing the activity, pasting and writing sentences related to the pictures given and using the present continuous tense. They started including their classmates’ names and their own names in the sentences. While they were doing the activity, I could notice that students were together deciding which verb they should use and checking the correct form of the verb “to be” in the present tense, considering the subject that preceded them. For example: Sarah is writing.

Picture 3: Leonardo is Listening to the music.

Picture 4: You are Listening.

Picture 5: They are taking a bus.

Picture 6: I am Eating.

Picture 7: He is Sleeping.

Picture 8: Doman is Sleeping in the bedroom.

Picture 9: Brenda is eating.

(Some of the sentences made by the students are shown the way they were written and are numbered in the same order they appear in the annex A)

While they were doing the activity, I was monitoring and giving any assistance needed. They used a dictionary to look up for more verbs and they were also using their course books. A few of them came to me to ask questions about the activity. Due to this, I decided to walk around to check if they needed more help and see how they were doing the activity.

Amazingly, I noticed that, by working together, they could do the activity and investigate in their notebooks. Some students were helping their classmates and answering questions. I could also observe that, when the group couldn't understand some parts of the activity, one student from the group came to me and asked me to give more explanations. Then, this learner would go back to the group and explain to the rest of the group how to do that sentence.

During the class, they were walking around in order to check with another group if what they had done was the same. Interestingly, when it wasn't the same answer, they came to me for more explanations in order to check which one was correct.

I corrected the activity they did, and afterwards I returned it to them. I asked them to see which sentences they had made mistakes and I told them to rewrite them in the correct way. The class finished and I left the classroom.

5.2 THE SECOND ACTIVITY: LISTENING AND BUILDING THEIR SELF CONFIDENCE.

As I have already mentioned before, most of my students do not study English at private English language courses. So, sometimes I confess being afraid of providing them with some activities which I think they might find really hard to do and that this might affect their self-confidence. I am really worried about the kind of activity I propose to my students, so they do not have a bad experience in learning English. I do believe that learners like the activities which have a challenge, but such challenge must be in a level which allows them to overcome the difficulties.

This second activity was suggested to me when I was studying about prominence at a phonology class taught by professor Inés Miller, in the post-graduate course.

After my presentation in her module, I commented that I thought it would be very hard for my students to work with prominence. Immediately professor Inés Miller disagreed and started to encourage me to try to do some activities with my students. I thought it would be quite tough to work well but, after some reflection, I decided to give it a try.

Firstly, I told my students that our lesson would be a “listening activity”. They asked me: “What is it teacher?” I explained that they would just listen to a trailer. I reminded them that the verb listen is “*escutar*”. Then I asked them: “If listen is “*escutar*”, what would it mean “listening activity”? They answered that it was an activity in which they would have to listen. I congratulated them to have understood it and then I gave more explanations about the activity.

I told them that we would listen to a trailer of a movie and I explained that the trailer was in English. They looked at me in panic and complained that they would not understand it. I calmed them down, telling them that they would just listen to this without worrying about getting the words. I asked them to write the sound of the words the way they listened to. For example, I explained that if they listened to a word and it sounded like: “Xis” they could write the way it sounded to them. And if they knew the word and knew how to write it, they could write the way they knew it: “She’s”. They promptly accepted the “game” as they called it. They listened to the trailer three times. And after that, I asked them if they had any idea about the name of the movie. They gave many answers until one or two of them said: “The Beauty and the Beast!” I congratulated them again and moved on with the activity.

After they listened to the trailer and wrote the words on a piece of paper, I had given to them, I handed the script of the trailer and asked them to find, in the script, the words they had listened to and then circle them. Together they did it. Then, they looked the words up in a dictionary. They wrote the meaning and together we interpreted the sentences of the trailer.

5.3 THE THIRD ACTIVITY: WHAT ARE MY LEARNERS' OPINIONS ABOUT OUR ENGLISH CLASS?

Exploratory Practice (EP) is a great tool for inquiring about our teaching and learners' learning processes. After having classes of Exploratory Practice, I found out another inquiry I would like to work on. This one was related to my learners' opinion about our classes.

I wanted to know what they thought of our class, how they felt after the activities I have been proposed to them. I also wanted to know how important they thought English is. This came to my mind when some of the students started a discussion. One group said that English is important; others said that English is a waste of time and there were groups that liked English because they had fun in studying it. So, in order to check their opinion, I had an idea of doing an activity in which I would be able to see what they thought of English. I asked them: "What do you think of English?" First, they started giving their answers orally while I listened to them. Then I proposed them to write down their opinions about English, as I noticed that they used adjectives to express their ideas. I thought it would be a good idea to have it registered, to better understand the way English is portrayed by them. I took advantage of the situation and introduced the expression: "In my opinion..." and "I think that English is..." so they could give their answers using these expressions as a way of enriching their vocabulary, improving their sentences and using adjectives to justify their opinions.

After writing some of their ideas on the board, I provided them with some coloured papers to write their opinions. They started answering the question "What do you think of English?", using the expression: "In my opinion English is...". I distributed a bilingual dictionary for them to look up the adjectives they wanted to use to express their feelings about "English and its learning". They got positive and negative adjectives, feeling comfortable to express their opinions knowing that it would be respected by all of us (teacher and classmates from that class)

They personalized their written form by using coloured markers, drawing whatever came to their minds on their paper and choosing to use capital or cursive letters. The answers were collected on a poster and the students walked around the room to check their classmates' opinions. They agreed and disagreed with what other

classmates had written, and I took the chance to remind them that we have to respect each other's opinions.

5.4 THE FOURTH ACTIVITY: LEARNERS DEVELOP THEIR OWN IDEAS

It is clear that some of the activities presented in this paper came from ideas and discussions which originated in classes about learning and teaching process at PUC-Rio. At the end of the course, there was a presentation where we could show our posters. The challenge was: What could I do? Why should I do it?

Talking to a professor, she suggested that learners know how to create interesting activities to work with whatever they are learning. I thought it would be a great idea and so, I decided to begin to plan this activity.

Based on this idea, I had a talk with my students, in the end of the class, and asked them to think about an activity, a game, anything they wanted to create in English. They felt really excited with the idea and started organizing groups. Others opted for working in pairs, while some students would rather work alone. I let them decide how they would like to do the activity. I set the next class as the day to bring to class the activities they created.

The day they had to bring their activities arrived and, when I entered the classroom, I was surprised by my students' anxiety. They started showing me the activities they had created in a very anxious and enthusiastic way. I had to calm them down to organize them to come one by one, or in groups, to show me what they had done.

The first one was a memory game. It was done on a cardboard covered by a blank sheet. Over the blank sheet, on the left hand side of the paper, there were pictures of different fruit. These fruits were: strawberry, apple, watermelon, pineapple, banana, lemon, cherry, orange and grapes. Each picture had their names below, in Portuguese. On the right hand side of the paper, there were pictures of circles, each one coloured in red, green, yellow, pink, brown, orange, black, and blue. All the pictures were drawn by the student, who had made an envelope to put the cards with the names, in English, of the fruit and the colours. The game was played by taking one card which had names of fruit or colour in English and then the player should relate it to the pictures on the poster.

If a player picked up a card with the word “red”, he should relate it to the red circle, and so on. The winner would be the player who matched more cards correctly.

The second game was a plastic glass and inside it there were lots of words. The name of the game was “Song lyrics”. According to the student, as one word was picked up from the glass of plastic, the person had to sing a song in which there is this word that was on the paper he had picked. The winner was the one who remembered a greater number of song lyrics.

The third activity brought could be played as a memory game or a domino. This game was composed of cards in which there were some pictures of fruit, vehicles, and school supplies. On another set of cards there were the names of fruit, vehicles and school supplies in English. As a memory game, the cards were exposed for some time and then the participants had to turn the cards and match the pairs. The winner was the one who matched a greater number of cards.

As a domino, the game would be played by two or four players. If we had four, they could receive 10 cards with pictures and the names of the pictures. If we had two players, they would receive 20 cards with pictures and the names of the pictures. If the first card showed the picture of “an apple” the next player must have a card which showed the name of this fruit written: “an apple”. If not, the next player would play. This would go on until someone had the written card to match the picture of the fruit. The winner would be the one who had no cards left in his/her hand.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected will be analysed according to Reflective Practice principles when it refers to the teacher's conceptions, assumptions, ideas, before and after the activities proposed. This approach reveals the teacher's thought before introducing some of the activities for these students and how the teacher poses after these activities, the first impression that the teacher used to have about the students and its changes by the results achieved during and after the activities proposed.

The analysis was also done in the optics of Exploratory Practice when it deals with the development of the learner along the class activities and it explains their achievement in relation to the five learners' propositions, which describe learners as research practitioners. Also, when teachers get involved in the process of developing learners as practitioners, they become, at the same time, a teacher practitioner as well; in the process of giving learners space to act, teachers improve the notion of developing learners and in developing himself/herself as a teacher practitioner.

Although there are five propositions, it is possible that one or more propositions cannot be applied in the analysis. This is because the nature of the activity does not allow all the propositions to be related to it. However, this does not mean that the learners did not develop as practitioners, but that they at least reached some of the characteristics listed. The seven EP principles will also be used in the analysis.

It is important to mention that the name of the students who took part in the activities are fictitious.

The presentation of the analysis will follow the same chronology in which the activities were practiced. This chronological order will reveal how the development occurred for both, the learners and the teacher. This work presents a teacher who is learning to be a research practitioner, trying to obtain multiple understanding about the class, the learners' ideas, and their capabilities.

6.1 – FIRST ACTIVITY: THE BOARD OF INSTRUCTIONS DEVELOPED BY MY STUDENTS.

One of the things that I had to experience during this activity was to control my anxiety because I had to understand that my students needed time to answer the questions. I had to respect their silence. And I understood that such “silence” is not just silence itself, it is their mind working and thinking in order to elaborate their answers. According to the first learners’ proposition, learners learn in their idiosyncratic ways. They interpret the information given and need time to process it. This time needed for them to learn and understand a given problem or situation is different for each one of them. In this activity the elaboration of the structure of the sentences was done together: my students and I.

The aim achieved in this activity was my students’ interests in doing the activity, their participation in doing it, their behaviour toward what they had not understood, their courage in exposing their doubts and sharing their findings with one another. Although the purpose of this activity was to check if they had understood the present continuous tense, it showed more than a subject that had to be learned, but the capacity that my students have in taking part in their learning, the ability they have to develop their level of understanding of a problem. When they came to me in order to check if what they had done was correct or not, because they saw that in some groups’ work, the same sentence was different. And when they received my explanation they went back to those groups and provided them the explanation they had just received from me.

Perhaps, one of the reasons that led my students to feel so comfortable in participating in this activity was that this activity was not ready to be delivered to them, they had to think, to build it together using the information they had already received in earlier classes, and for that they had to open their notebooks to investigate, to check, to review the contents in order to build the sentences.

All this behaviour used to be very different from our classes. I used to register some of my complaints in my diary about our classes: “Today, I got very discouraged while doing an activity with my learners, because I needed them to do it and to follow to the next content of the lesson, but when I asked them about the activity, they said that they hadn’t done it. I don’t know what to do, they never do what I ask them to do at home.” When I wrote this, I was really upset with my students, and I was thinking how

I would advance in the lesson without having them done their homework. Based on their answers I got some of the following ideas about my students:

- Learners are not interested in learning;
- Learners do not take it seriously because it is English;
- English is not a subject that they see as valuable and worth learning;
- Their parents do not help them at home;
- The students do not have their material organized.

These ideas made me feel unhappy and unmotivated too. Then, one day I decided to ask them why they hadn't done the activity and they started telling me the reasons. From that moment on, I had a new vision about what I was facing. Below is a summary of my diary entries, where I registered my students' answers when I asked them if they had done their homework:

- "I did not do it because I did not understand the activity"
- "Teacher, I did not find it in my notebook" (It means that this student did not find the subject studied in the notebook, perhaps he did not come to class, perhaps he did not copy it.)
- "I think English is difficult to understand"
- "I tried teacher, but I did not know how to do it"

Their answers led me to reflect about the way I was teaching them. I started looking for ways to provide them with activities which they could feel more secure, motivated, and happy in doing them. I started to think that my first impressions about my learners were not right at all. They were as frustrated as I was.

I immediately thought about my procedures in class, what and how I did things. I used to write the rules, theories on the board and I modelled the structure of the sentences. After giving some examples, I gave the exercises. I started to notice that they copied them, but some of them waited for me to give the answers on the board, while others tried to do the activities, but with great difficulty.

It was then that I noticed that I used to ask them to do their homework at home, but I would not do the activity in class with them. So, instead of teaching them how to do it and instead of giving explanations of how it should be done, I was about to change this by providing the students with something which included Exploratory Teaching in class.

This reflection about my teaching lit up a set of lesson steps to be monitored, with the intention of investigating how the students carried out an activity. My puzzle and my reflections upon why my students did not do an activity proposed, took me to another level of understanding about my students and my own work.

Dewey defines reflective action as that which involves active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or practice in light of the reason that supports it and the further consequences to which it leads. (ZEICHNER & LISTON; 1996 p. 9)

Thus, three attitudes which, according to Dewey, are integral to reflective action were present while I noticed my students' difficulty and started thinking about how to try to find a way to improve and develop their learning. However, the procedures which I was applying were not the ones which would encourage them to be "researchers" at home since they were not being a "researcher" in class.

The table below presents the attitudes which were explained earlier in this paper, and now show my development as a reflective teacher. Table of three attitudes of Reflective Action, by Dewey:

Reflective practitioner's attitudes	My reflection
Open mindedness	Reflecting about my puzzle and, after thinking critically upon my beliefs, I found out that I was asking the students to do at home what I had never done in class with them.
Responsibility	When I carefully reflected about the consequences of my actions.
Wholeheartedness	When I examined my own assumptions and beliefs and the results of my actions and learned something new: if I want my students to do something, I need to check if, somehow, they had already experienced it.

I understood that doing this activity it was not only for my students to develop their learning of the language or to instigate them to do the home assignment and show that they had all the material necessary to do it. It was also for the development of a reflective practitioner and teacher as well. I felt satisfied with this activity, they worked together, they were doing some research, and the activity was not hard for them. They were not afraid of not knowing and shared their understandings with the others. They were learning and teaching at the same time. My analysis covers not only my learners' development, but my own development as well.

According to the five propositions listed by Allwright and Hanks (2009), the data provided in this work show some aspects which characterize the learners' development as practitioners.

Learners' propositions	Students' activity:	Observations
Proposition 4 - Learners are capable of independent decision-making.	Students produced these sentences: <u>Leonardo</u> is listening to music. <u>Doman</u> is sleeping in the bedroom. <u>Brenda</u> is eating.	Learners gave examples by using their own or their classmates' names. This was an unexpected action and it shows their identities during the activity, their choices, and their decision-making.
Proposition 2 – Learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment.	This is found in picture 2 where two students are paying attention to what I was explaining and taking notes in their workbook, while the other student is looking attentively to the writing in order to understand and check if he is doing it correctly.	Although they had their groups, they sought for explanation or other sources of information in other groups.
Proposition 4 - Learners are capable of independent decision-making.	He is sleeping. Doman is sleeping in the bedroom.	Learners chose names, pronouns and complements.
Proposition 3 – Learners are capable of taking learning seriously.	Teacher's observation	Students did the research and shared their material with those who needed. They had a collaborative spirit with one another.
Proposition 5 – Learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning.	Teacher's observation	All of them were doing the activity and participating, there were no students left out.

(All the pictures related to this activity are in the annex.)

6.2 SECOND ACTIVITY: THE PROMINENT WORDS AND LEARNERS' KNOWLEDGE BEING REVEALED.

My analysis of this activity is that once more I overcame my own assumptions about my students' capability. If at the beginning I thought that this activity would be quite hard for them to do, my students once more surprised me. They not only wrote the sounds of the word as well as most of the words they heard were written correctly, even those we had not been working in class. Another point is that, after my explanation, they started enjoying the "game" as they called the activity. They stayed in complete silence in order to listen to the word and showed commitment while doing the activity.

The table below shows some of the students' lists of words. It contains the words listened by them and their correction. We have the names of the learners; in the first column the words they listened in the way they listened and in the way they wrote them down; and in the second column we can see the words they corrected by looking at the script, which they received after listening to the trailer and in order to find the words they wrote and check the correct spelling.

TABLE OF PROMINENT WORDS

1. Carol:		2. Ana	
Words listened	Correction	Words listened	Correction
1- Time 2- Light 3- Hello 4- Forever 5- Me 6- One 7- Love 8- She 9- Is 10- You 11- Bist 12- Promise 13- And 14- Nofin 15- Look 16- stand	11- beast 14- nothing	1- Time 2- Voice 3- Hello 4- Forever 5- Me 6- She 7- Love 8- And 9- Six 10- Promise 11- Stand 12- One 13- That 14- Fader 15- Look 16- Dance 17- You	14- father
4. Victory		5. Nick	
Words listened	Correction	Words listened	Correction
1- Helo (hello) 2- Me 3- It 4- Light		1- Heloou my 2- Restand 3- Love 4- Plis	2- have to stand 4 – please

5- Move 6- Love 7- Good 8- She 9- One 10- Bíblica (?) 11- Dance 12- Am 13- And 14- Look 15- That 16- Bele	10 biblica 16 Belle	5- Lite 6- Forever 7- Fire 8- Listem 9- Mim 10- Show 11- Seife 12- My frend 13- Fouse 14- By 15- Thing 16- Time 17- Dance 18- You	5- light 7- fight 8- listen 9- me 11- safe 12- my friend 13- ?
5. Ricardo Pedro			
Words listened		Correction	
1- Palavrinhas do trailer 2- Hello 3- Bigest forever 4- Gooooo 5- You have the stand 6- That small 7- Cound't in the light 8- Ever she is the one 9- you soothing the		3- beast 5- to 6- but 7- come to 8- If 9-?	

As Vygotsky says (1978), any learning a child encounters at school has always a previous story. In this activity my students were able to write the sound of the words that I had not showed them before, which appear to show that, somehow, they already belonged to their English language repertoire.

Each one wrote down what they already knew or what they understood from what they already knew (their previous knowledge). This part of the activity allowed learners to show their knowledge, respecting their individuality.

Learners are capable of developing as practitioners if they are provided with ways of working according to their time, capability of doing things, and ways of doing it. When we give the students a standardised activity in the same format for all of them, without allowing them to work with the knowledge that they somehow bring to class, we are excluding this “knowledge”. Consequently, the students may start to believe that what they already know is not worth at all.

In the next part of the activity, learners were told to find in the script of the movie, the words they had written down. Some words were corrected by them as they found them in the script, but there were some words that couldn't be found once their spelling made it difficult to identify. At that moment, they worked collaboratively not

only to find their words, but to compare what they found with what their classmates had also found too. Sharing their findings made them feel very proud of themselves.

At this point, we can relate to the second learners' proposition which says: "Learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment." These learners worked collaboratively, sharing their findings, correcting them and helping others to find and correct some words. Besides, they obtained from their classmates' new findings which enlarged their knowledge and interest in the activity.

All the attempts at doing the activity, asking me to repeat the trailer, their silence while listening to it, and their engagement in doing the activity, showed me that they did the activity proposed with great responsibility. They really believed in what they were doing and in how they were learning, and this might have a positive effect in their lives somehow. The activity was different, it was challenging, it was related to a movie whose main character was played by Emma Watson, a feminine activist and actress who took part in a famous movie called Harry Potter. The singers invited to sing and interpret the song "Old as a tale", the soundtrack of the movie, were Ariana Grande and John Legend, famous pop singers. As we can see, they linked the activity to a set of cultural elements which contributed to their motivation. Here, we find the third learners' proposition: "Learners are able to take their learning seriously." The activity proposed brought many other social and cultural issues and their participation gained serious involvement.

In the fourth learners' proposition we find that learners are capable of independent decision-making, which means that they can decide what they must do, when, how and who they will do it with. However, in this activity they were not able to choose what to do, how to do, and when to do it. Nevertheless, they were not told who they would do it with and they chose a classmate they wanted to work with. Moreover, in this activity they were free to exchange information with others who were not their partners in the lesson.

6.3 THE THIRD ACTIVITY: MY FIRST PUZZLE.

My understandings about the way my students thought of English were done by analysing the adjectives they chose to write their sentences below:

- 1- Yasmim – I think that English is boring, important.
- 2- João – I think that English is funny cool
- 3- Anne - I think that English is interesting, funny.
- 4- Luiz – I think English is Great
- 5- Mary – I think that English is wonderful, hard, important, funny amazing, interesting, and cool.
- 6- Alex – I think that English is cool, essential, hard, funny, important, amazing, interesting, wonderful, necessary, essential, and difficult.

In my first analysis I divided the adjectives into positive and negative. The positive ones I considered those that carried aspects of pleasure, necessities and happiness. The negative ones were those who gave me ideas of pessimism, lack of interest and level of difficulty. The table below shows the adjectives chosen by some students. They portray the language and its value based on their opinion.

	Adjectives	
Learners	Positive	Negative
Yasmim	Important .	boring
João	Funny, cool.	
Anne	Interesting, funny.	
Luiz	Great	
Mary	Funny, amazing, interesting, wonderful	hard
Caroline	Important, necessary, cool	difficult
Alex	Cool, essential, funny, important, amazing.	hard

By examining what my students wrote, I reached another aspect in my analysis of the adjectives and their meaning. As a consequence, I divided the adjectives which appeared in this activity into four categories, according to how I understood my learners' opinions. These are:

- Social impact: When my learners used the adjectives: necessary, important and essential to describe their opinion, I understood that they might unconsciously imply is that, to learn English, or English itself, is an obligation or an obedience in response to a social demand. It is required to know such language to achieve high position in life, at work, to be promoted in a company, and to travel. During our conversation some of them commented that people who speak English are important giving an impression that speaking English gives you "status".
- Personal satisfaction: adjectives which show that doing and learning is something enjoyable, pleasant. They express enjoyment in doing the activities and in studying. Adjectives which gave such impressions were: cool, good, amazing, great, interesting and funny.
- Personal dissatisfaction: adjectives which bring the idea that there is no pleasure in doing something. Example of this is when they described English as boring.
- Personal weakness: adjectives which bring the idea that what is being taught is hard to be learned and that it is necessary to make great effort to accomplish its learning. I could see this, when they expressed that English is difficult and hard.

Then I reviewed what everyone had written. After dividing the adjectives into positive and negative, and separating them into the above-mentioned categories, I will take them again and analyse every student's sentence.

Yasmim: important and boring

Yasmim revealed that the reason for learning English is not because it is enjoyable, but because it is essential. The adjectives do not bring feelings which carry affection, but an awareness that learning the language is useful and valuable, if you want to be successful in life. It implies that, even though she does not like it (when she mentions that English is boring) she must study it. The adjective "important" gave the impression that, although she seems not to find any personal satisfaction in learning it, she understood its importance, perhaps because of the social demand.

João: funny and cool

Anne: interesting and funny.

Luiz: great.

On the other hand, João, Anne and Luiz wrote adjectives that imply personal satisfaction, without taking the social demand into account. For them learning the language is enjoyable in itself.

Mary: Funny, amazing, interesting, wonderful and hard

Mary set positive adjectives denoting personal satisfaction. However, the negative adjective she listed, “hard”, showed that although this personal satisfaction exists, she encounters difficulties in learning it. Despite her difficulty in learning English, her satisfaction can be a good ingredient for her to overcome her difficulties.

Caroline: important, necessary, cool and difficult

The adjectives used by Caroline set the social impact, the personal satisfaction and her personal difficulty in learning the language. Perhaps, she understands that she needs to learn English due to the importance it has in our social context. She probably recognizes that it is difficult for her and that she needs to make an effort to acquire the language.

Alex: Cool, essential, funny, important, amazing, hard

The adjectives chosen by Alex show that, although he has fun while doing it and that he recognizes its importance, he needs to make an effort to learn it.

Analysing the list of adjectives chosen by the students, I understood that they show their feelings toward English. Most of them love, enjoy and like English and, at the same time, some of them are aware of its importance due to the social relevance it has nowadays, as a universal language. Finally, they demonstrated awareness of their difficulties in learning English.

This paper reveals that, through the language studied, learners had an opportunity to use it to talk about their experience with the language. Thus, this Exploratory Practice activity tended not only to improve and enlarge their knowledge of adjectives and also to provide space for them to show how they see themselves as learners of the language they have to study. Here, the second EP principle is present,

because language was used to enhance learners' awareness of their learning. In order to obtain the understanding of what my students thought about English, all the participants were involved in the process, and this shows the third and fourth EP principles because the work done served to bring people together to discuss the issues. The presence of the fifth EP principle is observed due to the way we together conducted the work in order to obtain mutual development, understandings that were not only for my students, but for me as a teacher as well. According to the sixth EP principle, working for understanding is necessarily a continuous enterprise, and the seventh EP principle, according to Allwright and Hanks (2009), states that integrating the work for understanding fully into existing curricular practices is a way of minimising the burden and maximising sustainability. Both principles were at work in this activity because through the analysis of the students' sentences, we see the continuous use of adjectives as we discussed the adjectives chosen in class. So, as a conclusion, learning does not have an end as a concluding chapter of a book, but it is a continuous link that follows another aspect of the language, relating this to the everyday life of the learners, both students and teacher.

6.4- THE FOURTH ACTIVITY: THE GAMES

If we knew what it was when we were doing,
it would not be called research, would it?
(ALBERT EINSTEIN)

In this activity the students were told to do whatever English activity they were pleased to. This idea came from a talk I had with my professor Maria Isabel Cunha, who introduced Exploratory Practice during my graduate course at PUC-Rio. During our talk she encouraged me to give my students an opportunity to bring to the class activities in which they would be in charge of the production, without my interference. So, this fourth activity is my students' personal creation. No ideas were suggested to them and all the material used in this work came from their own resources.

The table below displays the name of the learner who developed the game, followed by the game created, and the behaviour of the participants during the game.

Game developed by the authors:	Game	Participants' behaviour
Ruan	Memory game	Participants were enthusiastic when they had to match the word to its picture. There was no way to cheat. Everybody played it obeying the rules.
Carol and Meg	Caminho dos bichos (Animals' path)	Although some participants refused to obey the rules of the game, they decided them together. All of them agreed that the right thing is to respect the rules.
Mary and Jane	Domino	Participants were open to accept ideas and rules in the middle of the game. Discussions about what is allowed or not were done respectfully.
Peter	Checkers	There was no discussion of the rules. The rules that already existed were accepted.
Anne	Glass of music	Participants recognised the level of the difficulties of the game and adjusted the game in order to allow all the participants to play the game, respecting their ability.

This last activity was an opportunity for me, as a teacher, to see that learners, when allowed and trusted, are able to show their potential as practitioners of learnings

It is worth remembering the kind of research we meant to develop. If by research we mean thinking, deciding, creating, presenting and so on... According to Maria Isabel Cunha, in one of our conversations: “the research we mean is the one that learners, instead of taking the book from the shelf to do research, they are going to write their own books and put them on the shelf.” That is the research perspective we aim to produce and develop with the learners. Based on such views the five propositions conceptualize the ideas which make it possible to see this development of the learners (students and teachers alike) as practitioners.

During the activity proposed, learners developed their games according to their own idiosyncratic ways, once they had an opportunity to decide what type of activity of learning they would like to present. Secondly, the production of the activity was done by a group of learners or in pairs and this promoted an interaction among them. Thirdly, learners were motivated to do the activity. They cut and pasted, they decided how they would display the game or activity produced by them, they did their research on vocabulary items, and also the way they would perform the game and explain how to play them. They took it seriously because they were involved in doing it. Also, the rules, the instructions and the steps were created by them and this showed their commitment to what they were doing. Fourthly, they made independent decisions: if participants had to obey or refuse a rule, or if they could opt to do their adjustments due to the participants’ ability. Finally, in this activity it is clear to see that they developed as practitioners of learning because they were practically not told what to do, not even how to do it, they were free to create and design the activity they wanted. So, all of the five propositions proposed by Allwright and Hanks (2009) were present during the making of the games.

Moreover, we cannot deny that we reached a very positive working atmosphere. This could be perceived in the way the students showed their interest and motivation during the game. In addition to this, the atmosphere of commitment, the self-control it brought to our class during their discussion, and the awareness of being able to make adjustments in the game considering their own reality, as well as the needs of their classmates - all this contributed a lot to the growth of the positive atmosphere we had in that class. The understanding they acquired of how reasonable they were to accept their own difficulties, and also their sympathy toward the difficulty their classmates had in some moments of the game show that they were respectful toward the others. It is worth

noticing that all of them together agreed and disagreed with the decisions and adjustments that emerged during the game. This meant that their work and awareness were built by them together and that this led them to be involved in such understandings upon this classroom quality of life. The activity proposed brought people to work together, deciding together the way they would or would not play and organizing the game, thus portraying the spirit of mutual development. So, agreeing with Allwright and Hanks (2009, p.149-154) when they affirm that the first EP principle is quality of life, the second principle claims that this quality of life must be understood, and the third one, that we encounter the notion that everybody needs to be involved in this understanding, which was possible to see when the students decided together what should or not be allowed during the game. The fourth principle conceptualizes that the work needs to bring people together, and this interaction develops their abilities in accepting and respecting each other's ideas, even when they are not pleased to accept them. The fifth principle emphasizes that the work should be conducted in a spirit of mutual development, because when everybody takes part in a process, the spirit of a community of learning emerges and, consequently, the group reaches other levels of understandings.

7. CONCLUSION

Since I became a teacher I have been seeking for an enjoyable classroom. I have been qualifying myself in order to offer to my students a class in which they would be motivated and interested. I used to get sad when I felt that somehow a class given wasn't satisfactory to me and neither to my students. I still have this sensation when my students do not participate, do not show interest in taking part in the activities I am proposing to them. It seems to me that my classes somehow do not reach them. Because of this, I started studying ways to improve my teaching. That's why during the time I was writing this paper, I could not let the concepts related to Reflective Practice out of this work. When I was having classes at PUC-Rio, I read about Reflective Practice, I felt that this approach really matched the kind of teacher I have been trying to be. I was a reflective teacher without being conscious of this, until I started my readings.

As it was shown in this monograph, a reflective teacher is one who always reflects about what is done in class: before, during and after. As a result of these reflections, the teacher will develop strategies to improve the way he/she delivers the teaching, assuming the need to try to find a way of overcoming the problems in class. So, for all of these reasons Reflective Practice is present in this work to portray how I face my classes: my questions about my students' lack of motivation, my worries with the way I teach or the subject being too hard for the students to understand and accomplish the tasks.

By reading about Reflective Practice conceptions and its theory I expanded my knowledge. As a consequence, it changed the way I used to see my students and my work. Some of my reflections were present in the way I interpreted my students' behaviour and their discourse when they were doing the activities as well as when I analysed the data collected.

On the same level of importance is Exploratory Practice, because its purpose is to work with a given situation in order to understand it. So, working with puzzles and elaborating activities (PEPAs) related to the troubles and difficulties found during classes one can reach and work on understandings about them and minimize some undesirable behaviour. When I proposed to my students these activities, I could understand my students and my work more deeply. Just as Reflective Practice, Exploratory Practice enriched the way I now work in class. One of the things that I

tried to do, based on these conceptions, was to insert what we experience in our lives into our work in class, hoping that this work makes sense to all participants because it is an opportunity for us to discuss and think together about the situations we are facing in our everyday life, inside and outside our classroom.

Exploratory Practice and its principles and learners' propositions guided me to notice my students' development during the activities proposed and how my students could feel more motivated in accomplishing them.

However, it was not easy to insert some themes which belong to our everyday life in our work in class. Despite this difficulty, I had good results when I could see my students more interested and more enthusiastic in participating in class. I realized that, when I introduced in our content some topics related to our life, the students participated more since this was meaningful to them. That's why I dare say that, during the activities described and analysed in this work, I am moving toward to achieving a more meaningful and more democratic class, and also a class in which my students are practitioners who take up responsibility over their learning.

In my first activity I showed that I was looking for ways to improve my teaching. I analysed this activity in order to show my development as a reflective teacher seeking for better teaching. I don't know if there will be an end in this quest, but my wish is to show that a teacher is this person who is always seeking for better teaching. My first activity shows my pursuit of a better quality of life in my work. I felt insecure if these activities would work, if the students would enjoy and participate. I was glad to see that, in the end, the aim was achieved: they were developing as practitioners of their learning.

However, if I had to do it again, I would do more than I did. For example, I would bring the posters done by them and I would have a talk about what we did in the last class. I would reuse the posters in order to ask some questions like: What did you learn? Was it easy? hard? Why?... I don't know... but it would have been better than bringing them corrected. But I believe I could understand my work, my students and my classes. So, somehow it was important for me as a teacher and also for my students, because they shared the information and helped each other and things like these have never happened before in our class. I understood that it is possible to work together, that they participate more when they have a chance to express themselves, that they like to be challenged and enjoy trying to give answers and share their findings. But I believe the class environment must encourage them to do this. If they were encouraged not to

be afraid of making mistakes, if they were encouraged to realise that everything they say is valuable for our class and that they can trust themselves, that mistakes and some creative ideas are important to build their knowledge and finally that they are not alone because they are there as part of a community. During the activities, I saw my students being helpful, being the ones who could do the class research in their notebooks, or asking their classmates for more explanations and accepting their classmates' ideas respectfully. They were not imposing their ideas and they were not refusing to listen to the others, but together analysing their choices and thinking which would fit in that situation. I saw better quality of life emerging in my class.

In my second activity I had to challenge some ideas and beliefs I used to have about my students' capabilities. Once more I reviewed my belief that students come to class without any notion of English. They surprised me when doing the listening activity. Words and phrases, they had never seen before in our classes were heard, listened and understood. According to the second EP proposition learners are social beings, they come to class with their previous knowledge acquired in the interaction with the world outside.

The third activity, my attempt to work with puzzles and relate them to the subject we were studying was not easy. It was hard. I know that, for a more experienced teacher, it can be very easy to be done. But not! However, it was worth doing! At first sight, I saw those adjectives in a very innocent way, but by looking at the data collected and reviewing them, my ideas expanded. I understood the meaning of the adjectives they chose for describing what they thought about English, and this happened when I was analysing the work done. This activity showed me that understandings take time to be reached, and each time will bring a different level of understanding.

My last activity shows that these students who I thought had problems in doing class research were capable of creating their activities, deciding the rules and modifying the same rule when adaptation was needed. So, according to the fifth EP proposition, learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning. That means that they can create, think, state, organize and decide their own learning. Here, my students took their own ideas, their own ways to display their activities, and the ways to be developed by the others.

Finally, the conclusion is that students and teachers are numbed most of the time by the setting of procedures applied in class that do not help them to develop as

practitioners. These procedures are present when class management means control of the discipline; when standardization is imposed without considering who it is addressed to; when these learners are seen according to an ingrained judgement that they know nothing unless someone in class teaches them; that they cannot produce unless it is presented in class. The performance wished is not focused on the learners' grade but on the development of the learners as social beings, capable of participating in their own learning process. Otherwise, teaching does not contribute to the development of the learners, because learners do mechanically what is asked for and the subject studied is far from linked to aspects of the learners' lives. Teachers who are mechanical in their procedures and who see their work related to control of the class show results that most of the time come together with plenty of complaints about the students and the class. As a result, all of the participants miss the opportunity to enjoy, to share, to interact, and work for understanding the situations which intrigue them in class.

In short, I have been seeking for ways to overcome the situations I face in class by aiming to understand my work and its relevance to my students. I finally understood that this class is not only for me, but for them, for us. So, I concluded that the research we need is the one in which the outcomes are achieved every day and not in the end of the process - during the process, if we understand that the process never ends. Now, I am sure that I developed as a practitioner teacher because I learned by doing how to provide conditions, in class, to allow the learners to be more participative and because I gave them opportunities to develop as practitioners as well.

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9. ANNEXES

ANNEX A

FIRST ACTIVITY- LEARNERS DOING RESEARCH IN CLASSROOM BUILDING THE ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE.

A BOARD OF CONTENTS PRODUCED BY LEARNERS HAVING THE TEACHER GUIDING THEM.




ANNEX B

TABLE 01: THE LEFT PART OF THE BOARD.

The pronoun	The translation into Portuguese	The verb to be (estar)	Translation
*I	Eu	Am	Estou
You	Você	Are	Está
*He	Ele (Paul, Peter)	is	Está
*She	Ela (Anne, Emily)	is	Está
It	Isso /isto	is	Está
We	Nós	Are	Estamos
You	Vocês	Are	São
They	Eles / elas (Mary and John)	are	Estão

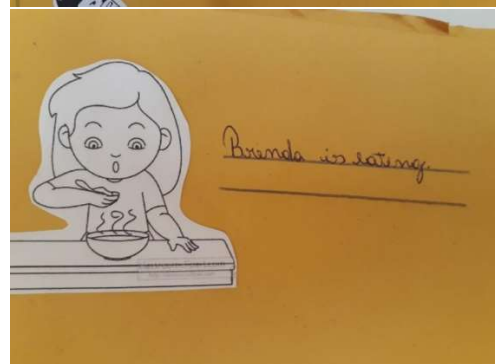
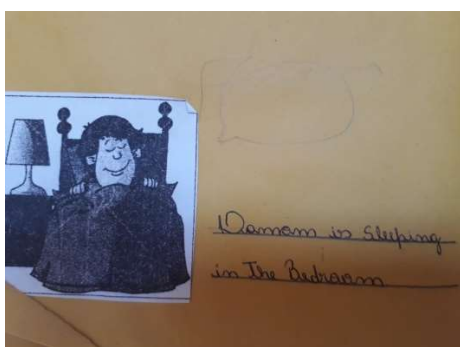
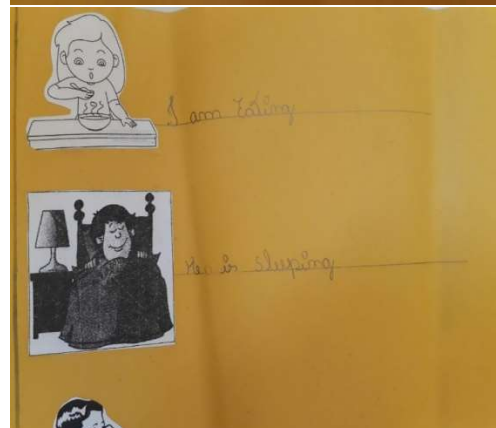
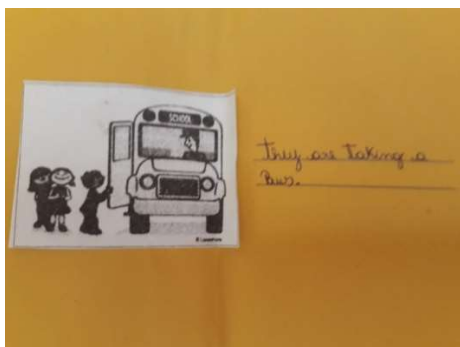
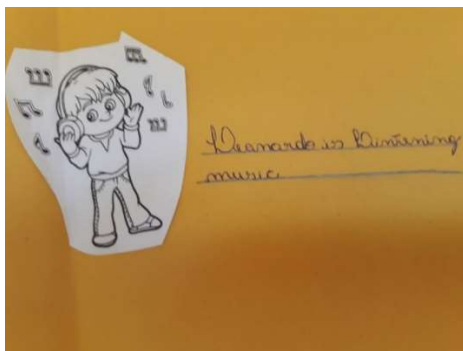
_____ + ING
(main verb)

THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE BOARD:

	<p>Lucas is studying now.</p>
	<p>Emily is washing now.</p>
	<p>Thalita and kailane are talking now.</p>
	<p>We are watching now.</p>
	<p>I am listening.</p>

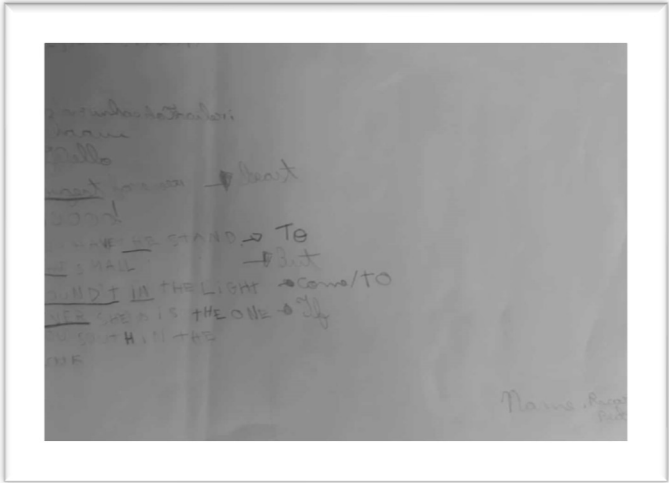
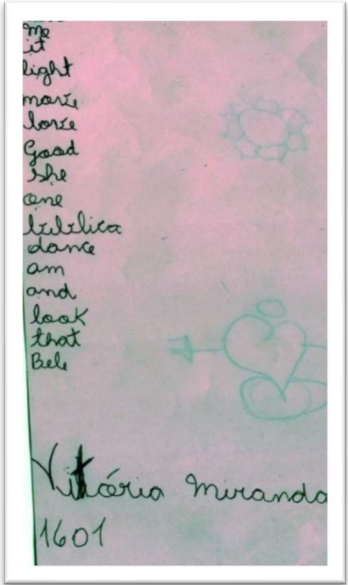
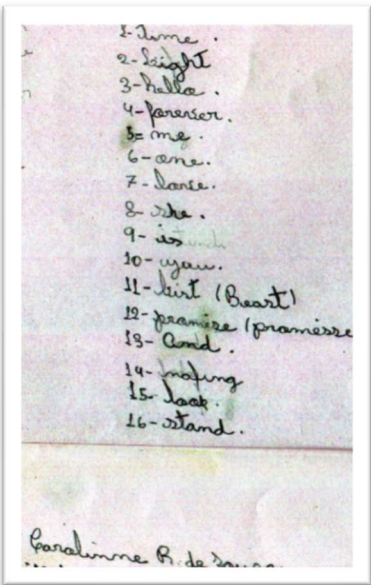
ANNEX C

Learners learning mutually.



ANNEX D

Second Activity: Prominent Words





1- ~~Yellow~~ Yellow my

2- Petulant

3- Love

4- Plus

5- Late

6- Forever

7- Fire

8- Listen

9- Min

10- Show

11- Life

12- My friend

13- Love

ACTIVITIES TO BE GIVEN IN CLASS:

TRAILER FROM THE MOVIE THE BEAUTY AND THE BEAST



FATHER: MY DEAR BELLE, YOU'RE SO AHEAD OF YOUR TIME.
THIS IS A SMALL VILLAGE

MAN: YOU ARE THE MOST GORGEOUS THAT I'VE EVER SEEN.
NOBODY DESERVES YOU!

FATHER: AND IT'S SMALL- MINDED AS WELL... BUT SMALL
ALSO MEANS SAFE.

BELLE: I'VE COME TO MY FATHER

BEAST: HE IS A THIETH

BELLE: COME TO THE LIGHT

BELLE: I WILL SCAPE. I PROMIS E.

CANDLE H: LOOK! A GIRL!

BELLE: WHO SAID THAT?

CANDLE H: HELLO!

BELLE: YOU CAN TALK!

CLOCK: OF COURSE! IT'S ALL HE EVER DOES!

TEA POT: HOW LOVELY TONIGHT YOUR ACQUAINTANCE.

TEA CUP: WANNA SEE ME DOING A TRICK?

BELLE: WHAT IF THE LAST PETAL FALLS?

CANDLE H: THE MASTER WILL REMAIN A BEAST FOREVER

CLOCK: AND WE'LL BECOME ANTIQUES

BEAST: WHAT DID YOU DO TO IT?

BELLE: NOTHING!

BEAST: GET OUT OF HERE! GOOO!

BELLE: YOU HAVE TO HELP ME. YOU HAVE TO STAND.

CANDLE H: IF SHE IS THE ONE WHO'D BREAK THE SPELL? YOU MUST FINALLY LEARN TO LOVE.

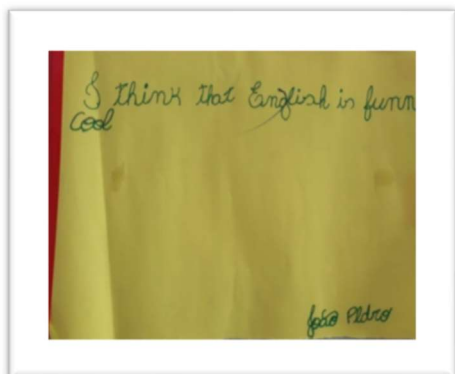
BELLE: HAVE YOU REALLY READ ANY ONE OF THESE BOOKS?

BEAST: NO. SOME ARE IN GREEK.

ELEMENTS OF NARRATIVE

ANNEX: E

Third activity: What do you think about English class?



ANNEX F

THE FOURTH ACTIVITY: GAMES AND ACTIVITIES DEVELOPED BY LEARNERS

MEMORY GAME

MEMORY GAME / DOMINO

CAMINHO DOS BICHOS

THE GLASS OF MUSIC