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Why do some of my students react uncomfortably to oral presentations? An Exploratory Practice work for understanding

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this research project is to try to understand the reactions of a group of young students when asked to perform oral presentations. I decided to carry out this project since I have observed that some of my students feel uncomfortable when they are asked to make oral presentations. According to the principles of Exploratory Practice, I decided to investigate why some students show resistance in this kind of activity. So, a Potentially Exploitable Pedagogical Activity was proposed in order to promote a collaborative work and also, there was a reflection upon the students' reactions in the whole process of presenting orally.

KEY WORDS: Oral presentations, students' reaction, Exploratory Practice, collaborative work, work for understanding.

RESUMO

O objetivo deste projeto de pesquisa é tentar entender as reações de um grupo de jovens alunos quando solicitados a realizar apresentações orais. Eu decidi realizar este projeto, pois observei que alguns alunos se sentem desconfortáveis quando são solicitados a participar de apresentações orais. De acordo com os princípios da Prática Exploratória, decidi investigar por que esses alunos resistência nesse tipo de atividade. Desta forma, um APPE foi desenvolvido para promover um trabalho colaborativo e também houve uma reflexão sobre as reações dos alunos durante todo o processo em todo o processo de participação em apresentações orais.

PALAVRAS - CHAVE: Apresentações orais, reação dos alunos, Prática Exploratória, trabalho colaborativo, trabalhar para entender.

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1. INTRODUCTION

> Exploratory Practice has been devised over the last decade or so to make possible the full integration of a research perspective into language teaching and learning, so that course time can be usefully spent, without prejudice to the teaching and learning themselves, on developing local understandings that will feed back into immediate course decision-making and also contribute in the long run to enhancing the long-term development of both teachers and learners. (ALLWRIGHT, 2003, p.6)

While reflecting upon this 'full integration of a research perspective into language teaching and learning' some questionings came to my mind: How could it be possible to integrate research and language teaching at the same time? In the beginning of the investigation, the connection between my role as a teacher and as a researcher was not easy to establish, it was necessary to build a bridge between these two roles in order to teach and make reflections at the same time. Since it was my first experience as a researcher, it took me some time to start taking the first steps because I was not confident enough to put into practice the investigation and, consequently, I conducted each step very carefully.

Besides the discussion about the integration between my role as a teacher and as a researcher, other questionings emerged, such as: To what extent is it possible to understand what is going on in my classes? Can integration play an important role in this process? Is it possible to integrate teachers and students to work together? While contemplating these questionings, I could realize that through Exploratory Practice principles it would be possible to integrate learners and teachers to reach understanding, because the idea of integration is part of the E.P principles. It was an eye-opening when I noticed that there was a possibility to understand my classes better considering different ways of integration. The starting point was to reflect upon my students' personal commitment during our classes vis-à-vis EP principles in order to develop a collaborative investigation.

My students were encouraged to practice their critical thinking upon their oral presentations. They were given opportunities to express their feelings and opinions and I found it relevant to know more about my classes through my students' views.

I have been an English teacher at a private school for three years now and this is my first experience as a private school teacher. Along the year, I observed an uncomfortable situation during my classes. It worried me because I was afraid that this situation could, someday, affect the 'quality of life' in my classes.

> "the quality of classroom life is itself the most important matter, both for the long-term mental health of humanity (and the mental health of the language teacher!), and for the sake of encouraging people to be lifelong learners, rather than people resentful of having to spend years of their lives as 'captive' learners, and therefore put off further learning for life." (ALLWRIGHT, 2004:14-15, *apud* GIEVE; MILLER, 2006, p.20).

As stated by Allwright, 'quality of life' plays an important role to maintain a good environment in the classroom. So, I started paying attention to my students' reactions upon oral presentations and how it could influence the atmosphere of my classes.

When I started working in this private school, the coordinator asked me to vary the kinds of evaluations and he pointed out that I should apply an oral evaluation per year. Bearing this request in mind, I decided to ask the students to make presentations in the last term of the year. However, I noticed that some of them reacted uncomfortably right away. While observing my students' reactions, I started to contemplate about my puzzle: Why do some of my students react uncomfortably to oral presentations?

In order to understand the reason(s) why the students showed resistance to the activity, the investigation started when I proposed the activity to them. In this way, I promoted a reflection with them about their reactions before, during and after taking part in oral presentations. So, along the process of investigation, moments for sharing understanding were generated and some clues were investigated. My students were encouraged to practice their critical thinking upon their oral presentations. They were given voice to express their feelings and opinions and I found it relevant to know more about my classes through my students' views.

This paper is organized in the following sections. Section 2 presents the Literature Review which explains Exploratory Practice and its role, including explanations about PEPA and PERA. Section 3 deals with Methodology and the details about the participants and their school. Then, section 4 is dedicated to the Discussion and Analysis: which is the discussion about the data generated bearing in mind the readings done in section 2 (Literature Review), and in this way establishing a significant correlation between data and theory. Finally, in section 5, Final considerations, I present my own understandings.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to Lincoln and Guba (2010, p.170), the participatory paradigm shows the "congruence of experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing leading to action to transform the world in the service of human flourishing".

Considering this philosophical way to define the Participatory Paradigm, I noticed that this approach permeated my investigation and it was crucial to define the way this research paper was intended to be conducted because it presents the idea of integrating all the participants. This paradigm promotes the empowerment of a community, seeking the participation of its members. It is worth mentioning that, the benefits from this type of investigation are not only gained by the researcher but also by all the participants.

In order to conduct a participatory research and develop a practitioner research, I have chosen Exploratory Practice (EP) to conduct the way I would work in my classroom. Accordingly, the present research paper discusses relevant issues based on the EP approach. According to Hanks (2007) EP may be similar to other forms of practitioner research, such as Action research and Reflexive research. All of them have some characteristics in common such as emphasis on a collaborative dialogue, which provides opportunities to explore and understand how things work in a reflexive way, focusing on 'empowering the practitioners', involving the 'elements of reflection' and considering the classroom the place of research.

As mentioned before, this paper has been guided through the EP principles, which were originated in the early 1990s in the work of Dick Allwright (Lancaster University), who made an outstanding contribution towards this framework. And on his own words, EP:

> "… is a way of getting teaching and learning done so that the teachers and the learners simultaneously develop their own understandings of what they are doing as learners and teachers. (ALLWRIGHT, 2006, p.15)

From Dick Allwright's point of view, EP is a way of integrating research with teaching and learning, and therefore promotes reflections about what is going on in the classroom setting. The principal objective is to create a collaborative work in which teachers and learners develop mutual understandings. The participants get involved in this process and become practitioners, taking advantage of the occasion to reflect better. It is connected to the way I will try to understand my puzzle.

Besides that, it is worth mentioning Allwright's definition of EP (1999), when he points out that 'Exploratory Practice seeks to meet this particular criterion by thoroughly

integrating the investigative work into the normal work of the classroom, so that it neither requires significant extra preparation time, nor any unsustainable changes to classroom life'.

According to his words the idea of engaging teachers and learners in working together with their puzzles, taking advantage of the common everyday activities and escaping from the "heavy burdens of teaching and learning", permeates the essence of EP. In order to reach some understandings, teachers and learners develop ways of working together, establishing common goals, which facilitates the reflection. The purpose is to integrate the classroom environment into research to conduct the investigation using language learning activities. These activities are the same used in a normal class, they only suffer some adaptations to be more meaningful and contribute to the investigation.

In order to use this framework as a tool in my practice, it is important to focus on the EP principles. There are seven principles that guide an EP reflection:

Principle 1: Focus on 'Quality of life' as the fundamental issue.

Principle 2: Work to understand it, before thinking about solving problems.

Principle 3: Involve everybody as practitioner developing their own understandings.

Principle 4: Work to bring people together in a common enterprise.

Principle 5: Work cooperatively for mutual development.

Principle 6: Make it a continuous enterprise.

Principle 7: Minimise the burden by integrating the work for understanding into normal pedagogic practice. (ALLWRIGHT & HANKS, 2009, p.260).

As stated in principle 1, the quality of life in the classroom should be considered as a priority. This principle is presented as a fundamental issue in order to highlight the importance of preserving the way the participants are and the way they act in classroom. In other others, the most important thing on Allwright and Hanks' view is to respect scenario that is already presented in the classroom. This means respecting the students' behavior and their personal characteristics. Considering this view, teachers and learners should take advantage of the reflection so as to try to understand the quality of life they have in the classroom.

Then, the second principle: 'Work to understand it, before thinking about solving problems' focuses on understanding instead of seeking to solve problems that may emerge, without having tried to understand them. Monitoring (ALLWRIGHT, 2003) can be the first step to start noticing what is going on, and it contributes to verbalize puzzles about life and the classroom. Principle 3, 'Involve everybody as practitioner developing their own

understandings', considers all participants as being 'fellows', rather than objects in the process of investigation and not as objects. The objective is to emphasize on a social mater, integrating participants.

Certainly, principles 3, 4 and 5 - 'Involve everybody as practitioner developing their own understandings.', 'Work to bring people together in a common enterprise.' and 'Work cooperatively for mutual development.' emphasize the EP commitment to the idea of engaging all participants in this process, empowering them in it, promoting mutual development and emphasizing a collaborative work. Principle 6: 'Make it a continuous enterprise.' underlines the idea of EP as being a process, 'keeping things going indefinitely'. So, EP develops a continuous work for understanding into classroom practice.

Lastly, principle 7 - ''Minimise the burden by integrating the work for understanding into normal pedagogic practice' points out the integration of what exists in the classroom with the EP work. The use of familiar classroom activities in this context may be tools to investigate what is going on. It is not necessary to change what is already part of the syllabus. The adaptations of the materials and activities is part of the EP work development.

Besides the seven principles, it is worth mentioning the five learners' propositions because they emphasize how learners should be treated by language professionals. The propositions were developed by Allwright and they are based on his experience about the learners that he has worked with. The five propositions about learners are:

1. Learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own unique idiosyncratic ways.
2. Learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment.
3. Learners are capable of taking learning seriously.
4. Learners are capable of independent decision-making.
5. Learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning.

(ALLWRIGHT AND HANKS, 2009, p 4 - 7).

Reflecting upon the first proposition and their relevance to this research: 'Learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own unique idiosyncratic ways', I noted the importance of respecting learners' peculiarities. It means that learners are 'key practitioners', so they can do their own learning. Being aware of learners' individuality is crucial because teachers can develop the best of each learner and go further if it is possible, in this way I can note that every content may be understood in a different way by each learner.

In addition, proposition 2: 'Learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment' presents the idea of considering the relevance of integrating learners. The focus is on the 'mutual supportive environment' and the integration of learners into the process, contributes to develop a favorable social setting and to create a productive learning atmosphere in the classroom.

Also, proposition 3: 'Learners are capable of taking learning seriously' calls attention to the capacity of learners in taking learning seriously. Sometimes teachers may think that learners are not interested in their learning process, but it is important to notice that they are able to be serious even if the teachers do not believe in them. Then, proposition 4: 'Learners are capable of independent decision-making.' points out that learners are able to act in an independent way. Considering learners as 'key practitioners', who can take learning in a serious way, the idea of choosing 'what to do, when to do, how to do it and who to do it with' is part of the independence that learners are capable of developing. So, they cannot always be told to do everything. The decision making of learners empowers them to act and develop their own understandings.

Finally, the last proposition: 'Learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning.' reinforces that learners can develop work for understanding. Depending on the maturity and ability of the learners and the existence of some aspects mentioned in the previous propositions, learners are able to 'share understandings, ideas and experiences.' In short, the emphasis on the propositions of learners helps teachers to comprehend the role of the learners when Exploratory practice is developed.

Therefore, there are useful tools that EP proposes in order to manage classroom activities. They are PEPAs (Potentially Exploitable Pedagogical Activities) and PERAs (Potentially Exploitable Reflexive Activities), which can be used in a strategic way in order to carry out Exploratory Practice during the classes.

> "…exploitable pedagogic activity (PEPA) or exploitable reflexive activity (PERA) during class time is valuable for teachers and learners alike. A PEPA or a PERA (Miller & Cunha, 2016) is the type of learning and teaching activity that is usually conducted in class time, yet these activities are slightly modified or adapted in order to capture more information or data. There are incredibly useful research tools…" (HANKS & DIKILITAS,2018, p.165)

So, through PEPAs and PERAs, it is possible to create an investigative environment inside the classrooms, facilitating the process of understanding. As mentioned before, the

routine of the classes is not changed; actually some activities are adapted so as to promote questioning, discussion and understandings.

Moreover, Morares Bezerra & Miller argue that PEPAs and PERAs are slightly adapted pedagogic activities that teachers and learners are familiar with (…) they are tools to involve practitioners in the reflexive process (2015: 105). When PEPAs or PERAs are being developed, the integration between research and pedagogy takes place, involving the participants in the process of investigation.

Such useful activities were built in this project and have established bridges between my students and I, contributing to put myself closer to my students' perspective, considering their feelings, reactions and opinions upon their oral presentations. In other words, providing students opportunity to discuss them while they are doing their classroom activity is meaningful. As a result, they can participate in the decisions taken in class.

To sum up, it is important to mention the opportunities that EP promotes in classroom environments, which preserve the 'quality of the classroom's life'. The relevance of the research to the participants and a focus on the needs of the participants are two major ones. In this way there is a mutual development in order to achieve greater understandings. The integration of the work for understanding into the teaching and learning encourages all participants to build a creative atmosphere and motivates them to work together during the investigation.

3. METHODOLOGY

Once I had a topic in mind to study, I needed to consider how I wanted to go about investigating it. First, I elaborated my research question: "Why do some of my students react uncomfortably in oral presentations?" and then I decided to guide my research within a participatory paradigm. Guba & Lincoln (2005, p.195) articulate the participatory paradigm as a "political participation in collaborative action inquire; primacy of the practical and use of language grounded in shared experiential context", which means that the role of this paradigm relies on a collaborative work and the participants develop their learning process though social practices, exchanging classroom experiences .

In this way, the choice of the paradigm is relevant because it permeates my data collection, the procedures as well as the analysis of the data. As mentioned in the Introduction section, I chose the Exploratory Practice framework as a perspective to try to understand my puzzle, bearing in mind the Participatory Paradigm.

The research focused on a private school located in Rio de Janeiro and its pedagogical emphasis is on preparing the students to take entrance exams to highly regarded schools in the city. There are subjects, for instance mathematics, in which the students study about 6 hours per week. So, the school adapts its schedule in order to provide more classes to those subjects considered more relevant for the exams that the students are supposed to take.

When I started preparing the English language classes, I decided to promote dynamic and pleasant moments to the students. So, I elaborated classes based on songs and playful activities and, since the beginning of the semester, I could notice that they enjoyed them. I could note positive comments from the students and also from the coordinators that they were enjoying the classes. However, the good acceptance of the proposed activities was not a routine. I realized that when I told them about making oral presentations, they did not seem to be satisfied, reacting in an uncomfortable way, and showing that they did not want to do this kind of activity.

This is the moment when my puzzle emerged "Why do some of my students react uncomfortably in (to) oral presentations?". It did not take me much time to notice this discomfort in my classes. So, it was a decisive moment as to realize that there was a possibility to develop an understanding of my puzzle based on Exploratory Practice. In order to do so, I had to adopt a different perspective inside my classroom, thus, performing two roles at the same

time: one as a teacher and another as a practitioner research. It was a challenge but also an incredible experience.

Guided by the principles of Exploratory Practice, I planned to start a collaborative investigation with my students. Beforehand, I took some preliminary classes to monitor what was going on in the classroom whenever I commented about oral activities. According to Allwright, monitoring is what we do when we pay close attention to what is going on in the classroom while we are teaching. So, the first step of my investigation was when I started 'monitoring' my behavior and some of my students' behavior in particular. It means that I observed their reactions through body language, facial expressions, what they said and who they were, in order to obtain information to take decision on further steps. As explained by Allwright (1996, p.2):

> From the perspective of the teacher 'Teaching', then, is what I do when I want somebody else to learn something. "Monitoring', by contrast, is what I do when I want to learn about what is happening while I am doing teaching

'Monitoring', on his view, aims at developing an understanding of what is happening in the classroom, through effective observations, considering the students' behavior

Considering Allwright's comments, I started monitoring and being more attentive to what was going on. Correcting their language mistakes was not the only focus anymore. So I started to observe my students more intensely when they were performing in order to try to understand their behavior and reactions. Every single moment was important during my classes, from the moment I told the students that they were supposed to choose a topic to make a presentation, until the end of the whole process involving their presentations. I also paid special attention to students who showed uncomfortable reaction so as taking notes of their comments.

Besides, I wrote a diary after each class. It was helpful to organize all the information collected. The diary was a place where I could register not only my perceptions and impressions but also my students' reactions. This contributed to create a connection with my reflexive readings about everything involving my classes, my students and about myself too.

Moreover, when the students' presentations were proposed, I told them that they would be graded and that they should do it in groups of 4 or 5 students. Also, I explained that the topic could be about a favorite band or singer, a favorite classroom activity or about anything that they considered interesting. In this way, the students were encouraged to choose the topics for their presentations, so they had the chance to make their choices by themselves, with no interference of the teacher. They were given 4 options: the first one was to talk about a favorite

singer or band, the second one was to present a favorite touristic place, the third option was to talk about a favorite classroom activity and the last one was a free topic where they could choose any favorite thing to present. I believed the idea of providing the students an opportunity to choose their topics to be presented would tell me their preferences and help me to come to some understandings.

Also, I told them that I would choose a topic and make my own presentation so as to try to experience what they feel when they are making presentations.

After that, in order to enhance this investigation, the students were encouraged to expose their opinions and feelings about their oral presentations. So, a PEPA was proposed in order to promote an active participation of all the practitioners. At this moment, we designed two posters and they answered two questions: "*What did you think about your presentation*? and "*How did you feel during your presentation*?". It took us the whole class to answer the questions and categorize them. All the answers were organized and pasted on the posters by the students.

On the following class, I concluded that it would be pertinent to show the posters to the students again. The objective of this activity was to get more information about what they had exposed on the posters in the previous class. So, I promoted a discussion and encouraged them to reflect upon their answers on the posters. Considering the lack of time that I had with my students, I decided to have the discussion in Portuguese, also I believed that my students would rather express themselves in their mother tongue. As a result, the discussion was a productive activity, they expressed their opinions in a comfortable way. This moment was recorded, and I transcribed the students' comments on my diary.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, I intend to show the findings that I could reach through the whole process of investigation. It means that I will report everything related to what I could observe during the classes that I monitored, the information that is in the diary, the students' answers during the PEPA, and also the students' feedback during a discussion promoted in class.

In this first moment of the investigation, I started taking notes about everything the students said about making a presentation.

Table 1 - Students' comments about the presentation they were supposed to make. (My translation)

This table presents some of the first comments they made when the activity was proposed, and the footnote lists all the comments made in Portuguese.

Uhm, that's cool![1]
I have difficulty when making oral presentations. Can I read what I am supposed to say?[2]
What is purpose of this activity?[3]
Can I read during my presentation?[4]
I do not know which topic I should choose.[5]
How long does the presentation take?[6]
Should the presentation be in English?[7]
I do not like to make oral presentations[8]
Can it be in pairs?[9]
Can I choose the topic another day?[10]
I do not know how to speak English[11]

The students seemed to be anxious to find out about everything they were supposed to do on the day of their presentations, and they made many questions at the same time. Most of the questions were about what they would present, about the time limit of the presentation and also about how I would grade their performance. According to their facial expressions and body

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[1] "Que legal"

[2] "Eu tenho dificuldade em fazer apresentações orais. Posso ler a minha parte?"

[3] "Qual é o objetivo da atividade?"

[4] "Posso ler na minha apresentação?"

[5] "Não sei qual tópico escolho"

[6] "Quantos minutos de apresentação?"

[7] "Tem que ser em Inglês?"

[8] "Eu não gosto de fazer apresentações"

[9] "Pode ser em dupla?"

[10] "Posso escolher o tópico outro dia?"

[11] "Eu não sei falar inglês"

language, I could notice that they were worried and anxious. I wrote all these details on my diary and everything that they said about this activity I was there too.

When I said that I was also going to choose a topic to prepare my presentation, they got really surprised. It was a good moment to encourage them and show that I wanted to experience the feeling of making an oral presentation. The students got a little bit excited after that and I believe that it was a crucial moment to engage students in this activity. In my diary 910/09/2018), I wrote

> (…) I told them that I am going to make my presentation too and they started laughing. I believe that they thought I was kidding. But when I wrote my name on the board, just like them, they were surprised. I felt that most of the students were excited about it.

After this moment, I felt that we were engaged in a collaborative work in order to reach an understanding. The "full integration of a research perspective" as Allwright explains, was consolidating my role and my students' role in our classes.

Taking into consideration what Allwright and Hanks (2009, p. 6) state "learners are capable of independent decision-making' (Learners' Proposition 4), it is relevant to highlight the moment when the students were choosing their topics to present. The students had the opportunity to decide what they wanted to present. The first topic was about a favorite band or singer; the second one about a favorite classroom activity and in third option, they could choose any favorite topic to present, for instance, they could talk about a favorite place, dish or book. These topics were exposed on the board, so they could make their decisions together and see their classmates' choices as well. In short, the students had the opportunity to negotiate meaning, choosing their topics in such a way they were capable to reflect about what they would like to present without the teacher's interference.

Accordingly, I prepared a PowerPoint presentation talking about the oral activity, providing the options of the presentations and they were supposed to write their names for the group below the topic that they chose. One of the topics was about "a favorite classroom activity". When I decided to provide this option, my intention was to try to give the students the opportunity to report an activity that they really enjoyed. I believed that maybe throughout a presentation of this topic I could understand which other activities they would prefer instead of making presentations. Only one group chose this topic and they presented an activity related to music, very similar to the one I had been working with them during the year. I realized that most of the students chose to present about a favorite band or singer and they seemed very

excited choosing their favorite artists. It was interesting because I realized that they really enjoy when we work with music. Besides, only one group decided to present a favorite place.

This was an opportunity to develop one of the Exploratory Practice principles which is the use of an activity that is already in the schedule being adapted to promote understanding, turning itself into a PEPA. Consequently, it was not necessary to change anything in relation to our syllabus because through what was already planned, I could manage the classes to be productive and still provide meaning.

In order to have a feedback about the students' answers in relation to their presentations, two posters were prepared in class. First, I elaborated two questions that I believed would help me obtain relevant students' answers in order to contribute to my research project. So, the questions were displayed on two different posters and hanged on the board, so that everybody could see them easily. Then, I asked the students to reflect upon the questions and try to answer them. They wrote their answers in pieces of paper and pasted them in the posters. In this way, the students were encouraged to report their opinions and feelings upon their presentations.

Table 2 - Students' poster with their comments about their presentations. (My translation)

What did you think about your presentation?			
		Positive answers	**Negative answers**
Cool	Beautiful	Beautiful	I think it was bad
It was nice	Good	good, very good, excellent and beautiful	It was terrible, I do not know how to speak English
Cool	it was great	so good	It could be better
Very Good	so good	Good	It could be better
Nice	Amazing	For me, our presentation was awesome, simple, beautiful and worderful. We chosed this contry to talk about because Iceland is a place with a lot of mistery, identity	
Great	Awesome	Good	

Table 2 portrays how the students felt during their presentations. It is relevant to note that they evaluated their presentations in a positive way. The adjectives that they mentioned

show that they liked their performance. Only a few students mentioned that they disliked their oral participation.

Table 3 - Students' poster with their feelings during their presentations (My translation).

How did you feel during your presentation?		
Positive Feelings	**Negative Feelings**	
Very happy	I felt insecure and very nervous	I felt a little bit nervous
Normal	I felt very nervous	I felt very nervous
Normal	Nervous	I felt nervous and shy
Normal	I felt nervous	Nervous
I felt good	Tense	Nervous
I felt good talking about a topic that I like, for instance, the sitcom	I felt very nervous	Nervous
Perfect	Nervous	I'm felt very nervous
	I felt a little bit worried	feeling of nervousness

According to their answers on table 3, most of the students showed a negative perspective. They described their feelings saying that they were nervous, insecure, worried and shy. On the other hand, only a few students said that they were fine, normal and good.

Considering both tables, and analyzing the students' opinions and feelings, I can realize that there is a gap between them. Bearing in mind that most of the students liked their presentations, the logical conclusion would be that they would have felt comfortable while presenting. But it was the opposite, they answered that they felt very nervous.

So, another puzzle came out: "Why did my students say that their presentations were good, but at the same time they said they were very nervous?" In order to try to investigate this other puzzle, I decided to invite them to have a discussion with the whole group. First, I placed on the board the two posters that we had previously built together. Then, I showed them that I would like to know more about the gap that was established between one poster and the other. So, I asked them the reason why they said that their presentations were good, but at the same time pointed out that they felt very nervous and uncomfortable. The whole discussion was recorded, and I selected the most important parts of it, considering the relevant comments to my analysis.

Table 4 - Students' feedback about a gap between how they felt during the presentations and their opinions about their performance in the presentations. (My translation)

Why did you say that your oral presentations were good, but also say that you got nervous while making them?
Anxious[12]   I do not feel secure[13]   I felt under pressure, because my presentation was going to be graded[14]   Everybody keeps looking at me.[15]   It is not my mother tongue[16]   I do not feel comfortable [17]

According to table 4, I could note that the students were more focused on their issues, providing more details in relation to their feelings. For instance, when one of them responded that: "*I felt under pressure* (…)" and when another student reported: "*That is because everybody keeps looking at me.*". At this moment, they presented precise comments, they exposed how they felt "*insecure*" and "*under pressure*" before and during the presentations. I could note how attentive my students were in relation to the experience they lived in the classroom, consequently it was an opportunity to generate understandings concerning the teaching/learning process. Analyzing my students' performance during this moment of the investigation, I could note that the Proposition 3: 'Learners are capable of taking learning seriously" is clearly presented because through their posture and comments, they showed how engaged they were in this process.

It is worth making a comparison to the students' comments on the posters, which were reported on tables 2 and 3 and their comments in the final discussion promoted in class. In relation to their comments on the table 2, I concluded that they were superficial, most of their comments had only one word. When they answered: "*cool*", "*great*", "*good*", they seemed to express almost the same positive opinion about their presentations. Besides that, on table 3, the idea of nervousness was predominant and most of the time it was also expressed in a few words

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[12] "Ansioso"
[13] "Não me sinto seguro"
[14] "Me senti pressionado porque valia nota"
[15] "É que todo mundo fica olhando"
[16] "É que não é a minha língua materna"
[17] "É que não me sinto confortável"

and in a superficial way, for instance: "*Nervous*", "*Very nervous*", "*I felt insecure*" and "*Tense*". On the other hand, throughout this final discussion, the students expressed themselves in a specific way, presenting relevant issues to understand the reasons why they feel uncomfortable upon oral presentations. For instance; when one of the students talked about the pressure of speaking a language that is not their mother tongue ("*that is not my mother tongue*"). It shows how they got involved in the investigation, reflecting and reaching understandings. It goes along with one of the seven principles of EP and also one of the five Learners' Propositions (Principle 3 and Proposition 5), which present the importance of involving everybody as practitioners developing their own understandings. (ALLWRIGHT & HANKS, 2009)

Moreover, as stated in Allwright and Hanks (2009), teachers are officially in charge of the practice of language teaching in the classroom, but they have to leave the actual practice of language learning to the learners. Only the learners can do their own learning. These ideas made me reflect upon my students' group discussion. I realized that by promoting a group discussion, I provided an opportunity for my students and I to reflect on the issue in question of doing presentations and at the same time, we negotiated ideas and promoted mutual understanding so as practicing our roles as researcher practitioners.

Table 5 - Students' feedback about an idea to avoid this situation during this kind of activity. (My translation)

What could be done in order to make this situation change? How could you feel calmer or more comfortable during this kind of activity?
Practicing more!...with more practice it could be better[18]   You could promote more oral activities[19]   We could have more practice[20]   I think that the oral skill is more important than grammar[21]

Then, what stands out most is the information obtained on table 5. It called my attention when they said that they wanted to have more practice, because even showing through the discussion that they do not like making presentations, they exposed a willingness to improve

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[18] "Treinando mais!... com treinamento ficaria mais fácil"
[19] "você poderia dar mais prova oral"
[20] "poderia ter mais treinos"
[21] "acho a parte oral mais importante do que a gramática"

their oral skills and consider this activity important. In this way the students showed the importance of what can be done. I interpreted my students' feedback as being a suggestion and it was really important for my practice as a teacher, through these students' answers I stated reflecting upon my attitudes and the consequences of them.

Considering my students' comments on table 5, especially when they mentioned: "*with more practice it could be better*" and "*you could promote more oral activities*", I reflected on what Allwright and Hanks (2009, p. 6) point out in the Learners' Proposition 5: "learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning". Students are able to be the protagonists in the learning process, they are also capable of reflecting upon their own learning. In this way, students are considered as 'key practitioners of learning', by 'sharing understandings, ideas and experiences'.

Noticeably, my students were able to realize that they needed more practice in order to develop this oral skill. It was possible to note that they were capable of reflecting seriously, as announced by Learners' Proposition 3. They were respectful regarding this situation and expressed their opinions in a conscious way. Throughout their observations and reflections, they reached maturity in relation to their own learning, generating understandings as practitioners. At this point they were not mere targets of teaching in which teachers hold the knowledge and students are passive, receiving only knowledge transmitted by the teacher.

Finally, reflecting upon this whole discussion, I started thinking about the few number of classes I had with this group and I realized that it is difficult to put into practice an activity that the students criticize. The level of motivation of the students is closely connected to the motivation of the teacher to continue applying certain activity or not. Actually, promoting oral activities in this 9th grade group was becoming a burden for me as a teacher. But when I started the investigation through EP, these moments of promoting oral practice started being more meaningful and clearer. My 9th grade students' resistance in making oral presentations may be directly associated to the lack of oral practice activities in class. It was an opening eye when my students provided answers about the necessity of having more practice. When I reached this understanding, I became aware of how EP contributed to make me become more critical. It also showed me the importance of listening to my students more, because "working cooperatively for mutual understanding" (ALLWRIGHT & HANKS, 2009) is crucial when we are dealing with the process of teaching /learning and teachers/learners.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Guided by the principles of EP, I developed this paper in order to investigate why some of my students reacted uncomfortably in oral presentation. So, we experienced a collaborative work, aiming at reflecting upon the students' reactions in the whole process of presenting orally; in other words, not just the moment students were presenting. The whole process of investigation was developed bearing in mind the idea of integration of all participants.

Considering the challenges faced during the investigation, I can say that the greatest one was managing the time to develop the Potentially Exploitable Pedagogical Activities (PEPAs). As I mentioned before, my group had only one class of 50 minutes per week. The school syllabus was large and there were many school projects that my 9th grade students had to take part. So, dealing with the lack of time and having to adopt the role of teacher researcher, I believe I had to manage the EP and school syllabus in the best way possible.

It also makes me reflect upon how I could have gone beyond what I did in the investigation. It would be interesting if my students and I had the opportunity to discuss about my own presentation. It might have contributed to my students' awareness of another person presenting. They would have discussed about their observations in relation to my performance while I was presenting.

Another relevant issue that deserves to be pointed out here is about the discussion (tables 4 and 5) promoted in class because it could have been done in English. I had in mind that it would be easier for my students to express their opinions in their mother tongue and it could contribute to make them speak more, providing more information.

On the other hand, by allowing my students to discuss in Portuguese, I reinforced their insecurity to speak in English. Inviting them to practice the language and at the same time trying to understand better what was going on would have integrated research and pedagogy. In other words, I could have taken advantage of this discussion in order to provide them the chance of practicing their oral skills and in such a way to understand what intrigued me and also them in relation to their reactions upon oral presentations.

Furthermore, it was admirable how the students were respectful during the whole process. They reflected upon the puzzle, assuming the agency in the process of teaching and learning together with their teacher who was conducting the activities.

In addition, the students presented no resistance in exposing their opinions. It was done honestly. At no moment, they denied reflecting upon what was being investigated. Most of the

time they made an effort to make meaningful and clear comments and contribute collaboratively during the discussions.

As a result, it was established an integration between my students and I, which facilitated an exchange of ideas and negotiation of meanings. In short, the opportunity to develop an EP work with my students helped me not only to reflect better, but also to see and to listen to them better, generating mutual understandings. And the most important issue was that I could comprehend their perspective in relation to making oral presentations and the effects that this kind of activity provoked on them.

Throughout the whole process of investigation, I can say that it was an amazing experience as a teacher and as a novice researcher. Overall, doing this research and considering all the reflections raised and understandings reached, another puzzle emerged: *'Why do I not promote more oral practice in the classroom?'* It is interesting because the initial puzzle focused on the students' perspective in relation to their oral practice and the new puzzle deals with my practice as a teacher. This makes me reflect upon my practice inside the classroom, and my role in the language learning process, enriching my experience as a professional.

Finally, after all this amazing experience, I can note that by writing this paper I have learned a lot more than I expected to. It contributed to my grown both personally and professionally. Besides that, I hope that this work can be useful to other teachers, who have the desire to work with the EP framework in order to generate understandings to the puzzles that usually emerge in our language classrooms.

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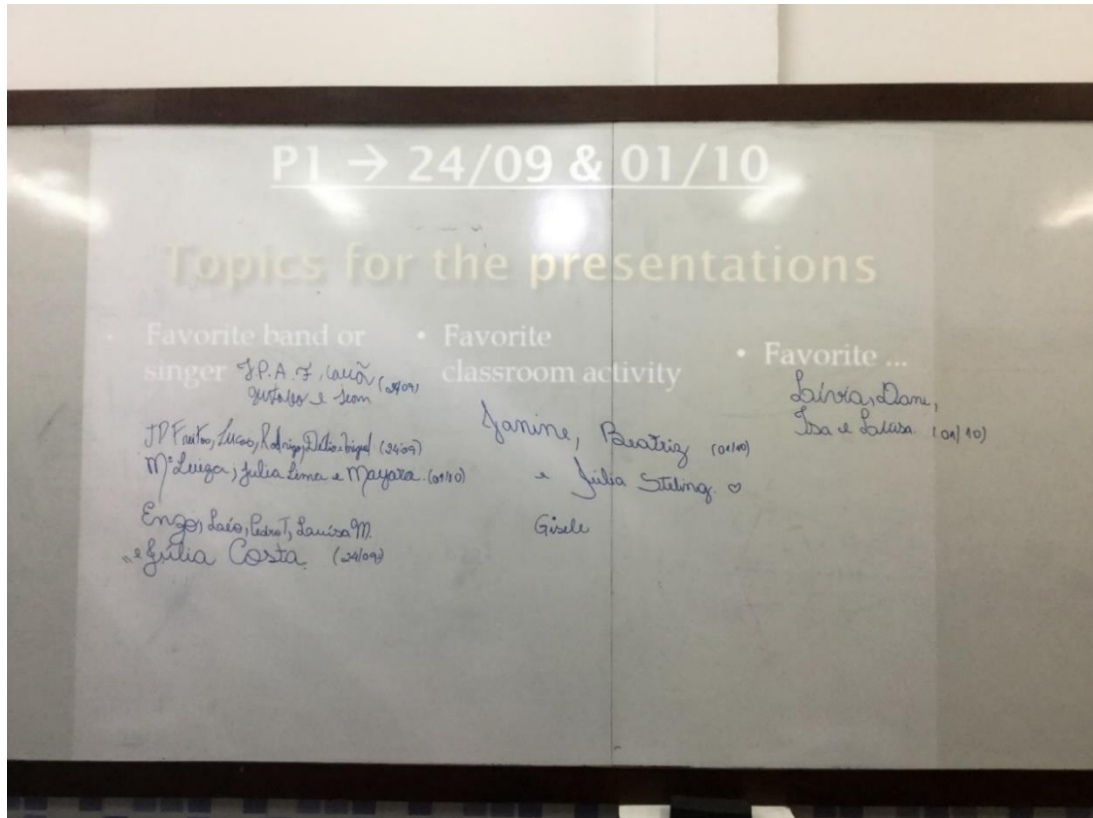
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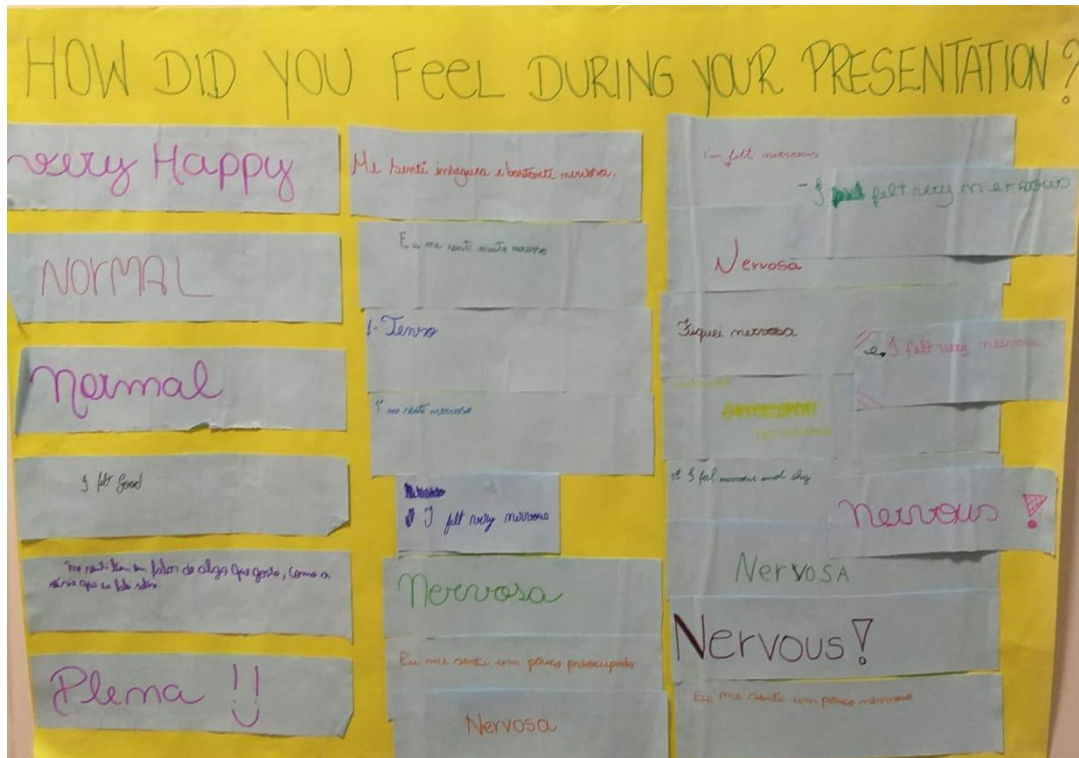
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6. ATTACHMENTS

Picture 1

Picture 2

Picture 3