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**Why is it so? Understandings from oral presentations in a
language classroom**

DEPARTAMENTO DE LETRAS
Curso de Especialização em Língua Inglesa

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Língua Inglesa.

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Abstract

Nassif, Débora de Barros; Cunha, Maria Isabel A. **Why is it so? Understandings from oral presentations in a language classroom.** Rio de Janeiro, 2020, 46 p. Monograph – Departamento de Letras, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

The aim of this paper was to investigate puzzling questions that emerged from oral presentations performed by adult students in a language course located in Rocinha – Rio de Janeiro. The opportunity for this work came from a need to enhance students' oral performance, which was habitually assessed by teachers through classroom participation, oral exams and oral presentations. I reviewed the concepts within the scope of Exploratory Practice, and discussed their interrelation with concepts of Affect and the Affective Filter. I described the activities that generated the puzzles, and the work for understanding that followed. Lastly, I made considerations on the meaning of the work.

Keywords: Exploratory Practice, Oral Presentations, Understanding, Puzzling

Resumo

Nassif, Débora de Barros; Cunha, Maria Isabel A. **Por que é feito assim? Entendimentos a partir de apresentações orais em uma aula de língua inglesa.** Rio de Janeiro, 2020, 46 p. Monografia – Departamento de Letras, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

O objetivo deste trabalho foi investigar questões que emergiram a partir de apresentações orais realizadas por alunos adultos em um curso de língua inglesa localizado na Rocinha – Rio de Janeiro. A oportunidade para este trabalho veio da necessidade de aprimorar a habilidade oral dos alunos, a qual era usualmente avaliada por meio de participação em aula, exames orais e apresentações orais. Realizei uma revisão dos conceitos dentro do escopo da Prática Exploratória e discuti a sua relação com os conceitos de Afeto e Filtro Afetivo. Realizei a descrição das atividades que motivaram as questões trabalhadas, e descrevi também o trabalho realizado na busca de entendimentos para estas questões. Por fim, realizei considerações acerca do significado deste trabalho.

Palavras-chave: Prática Exploratória, Apresentações Orais, Entendimento, Questionamento

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1. Introduction

Since I have started teaching English, feeling good while working has been an issue for me. In fact, it has been important since long before, throughout my college years and other work experiences. Initially, the aim of this paper was to investigate moments of classroom life that may bring understanding on the topic of being happy in class, in light of the theoretical framework of Exploratory Practice, as the approach is proposed by Allwright and Hanks in their 2009 book *The Developing Language Learner*. However, the puzzles that emerged in class ended up not being about happiness itself. My students and I found moments for reflection upon our lives at a foreign language course, having a curricular activity as a starting point. Therefore, the aim of this paper turned out to be to investigate puzzling questions that emerged from that curricular activity.

The opportunity for this work came from a need to enhance adult students' oral performance at an English course located in Rocinha – Rio de Janeiro. The course required students to deliver oral presentations about various topics, and those yielded the puzzles on which we worked. The students and I worked together in an attempt to understand our difficulties and strengths through ressignified classroom activities proposed in the scope of Exploratory Practice – henceforth Potentially Exploitable Pedagogical Activities (PEPAs).

This work begins with a Literature Review on concepts of Exploratory Practice and Affect. Within the Exploratory Practice section, I use the voices from authors in the field to discuss effectiveness, results, control, third-party research versus practitioner research, planning for understanding, quality of life and sustainability in classroom research. After that, I comment on the Seven Principles of Exploratory Practice and on the Five Propositions about Learners, both quoted from Allwright and Hanks' work (2009). In the section dedicated to the concept of Affect, I introduce Arnold's (1999) ideas and connect them with the concept of the affective filter, brought by Krashen (1987). Finally, I have dedicated a section to comment on forms of Assessment, again borrowing the voices from Allwright and Hanks (2009). All of the concepts in the Literature Review were important for the work described in the next section.

The Methodology section begins with a description of the language course where I worked, including details of the location, the premises, students and lessons. I then thoroughly described the class activities that triggered the work for understanding developed in the language lessons. Next, I presented the puzzles that came up in class and the understandings that came from the students. Lastly, I reflected upon the understandings generated in class in light of Exploratory Practice.

In the Final Considerations section, I made some reflections on the meaning of Exploratory Practice for me. Lastly, I bring back the puzzles and make some general reflections about the meaning of this work.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Exploratory Practice

I have always been concerned about my classes being a valuable experience for the students and for me. The possibility that class time would be ineffective or wasted would bother me deeply. However, my views on what is valuable and what is effective have been changing over the last few years. Due to my previous years of study – research and work in the natural sciences – I was used to thinking of effectiveness in terms of the production of reports containing concrete results.

Working as a teacher, I have been forced to see that “results” were seldom as concrete as I wanted them to be. This caused a conflict of ideas for me, which was eased after I read Allwright’s considerations on *method, planning and control* (2003). In his text, Allwright explains why, for him, the notion of *method* “should have died a good many years ago” (2003, p. 1), by contextualizing the language-teaching scenario from the mid-20th century onwards. First, he briefly describes the Pennsylvania Project, a large-scale experiment conducted in the 1960s with the aim of comparing the audiolingual and cognitive methods for language teaching, which was not able to demonstrate superiority of one method over the other. What followed, Allwright says, was the rise of some rather bizarre methods and the ultimate “victory” of what we now know as the *communicative approach*, which, according to him, can be described as a series of suggestions based on the idea that learning will take place as long as communication is happening. He argues that the logical outcome of the Pennsylvania Project would have been a disregard for method, and that what happened instead was the massive adoption of the communicative approach, as a new and universal method. The problem, according to Allwright, is that the method maintains teachers attached to the notions of planning and control, which can be misleading, since it is impossible to plan and control everything that takes place in a classroom, with and among human beings.

The issue of control is consonant with a later text, written with Miller where they say that teachers seek for technical control as key for their “psychological survival” (ALLWRIGHT; MILLER, 2006 apud Bezerra et. al., 2007, p. 197). It is

such a great challenge to deal with all that goes on in a classroom that it is natural for us as human beings to try to be in control of something. In my experience, I would look for techniques, explanations and methodologies, hoping that these would help me cope with things that were in fact beyond prediction and any form of control. Bezerra et al. (2007, p.198) relate issues of technical expertise and control by summarizing that “neither technical diversity itself nor mastering teaching techniques can give teachers control over their learners (their wishes, opinions, world view, etc)”.

In their text, Bezerra et al. (2007) present puzzles raised by undergraduate Pedagogy students. One of them was “Why is the class *Práticas de Ensino* (teaching practices) at the end of the course curriculum?”. This puzzle, according to the authors, brought up the students’ natural desire to practice, instead of theorizing about the practice. In my experience as an undergraduate student, I felt the same wish to practice instead of just having theoretical classes. I believe that the way graduate courses are organized reflects the belief that technical control is key for success at the workplace. The authors oppose this view by saying that the contributions from both teachers and student teachers are relevant. When referring to teachers and student teachers, these researchers argue that student teachers must take ownership of their role regarding the understandings of classroom life previously made by external researchers. “He (the student teacher) undoubtedly has something to say” (BEZERRA et al., 2007, p. 197?). Allwright and Hanks agree, while presenting a review on third-party research, by writing that “the agency of learners as potential researchers has been sadly neglected” (2009, p. 108). I connect these views to the way I see myself, as a language teacher, and the way I see my language students. I used to think that only a highly technical external opinion would be valid and relevant to evaluate the work inside a classroom, but now I believe that the most valuable authority to refer to classroom life are the participants of that classroom.

At this point in my professional experience, I strongly relate to the aforementioned thoughts on control. The institution I worked for operates in a franchising system and there is an internal team that writes and publishes all the material to be used in class, including books and recordings for listening practice. The courses are

said to follow the communicative approach, therefore English is to be used at all times during class. Based on the assumption that all franchise branches must be standardized, pedagogical coordinators require language instructors to follow the Teacher's Guides sent to the teachers together with classroom materials.

When I started working at the institution, I felt powerless because the guides said I was supposed to predict every students' reaction, which seemed to me like an stressful and worthless task. This high level of anxiety was of course eased after I gained some experience, but it was not until I came across the idea of *planning for understanding* that I could see my own work as a process of observing and making the most of every opportunity, and not as a delusional attempt to always know what was about to happen.

Planning for understanding is the type of planning proposed by Allwright (2003) when he introduces the notion of Exploratory Practice (EP). He argues that working together with students in order to *understand* what goes on in class and potentially (but not *intentionally*) solve classroom issues, is beneficial both for the success of classroom activities and for the language learning itself, since the activities may be conducted in the target language while working on items from course syllabus. The term PEPA (Potentially Exploitable Pedagogical Activities) has been used in EP "for such classroom practices that also constitute work for understanding" (ALLWRIGHT, HANKS, 2009, p. 157). The work for understanding may include reflection about grammar topics as well as all kinds of activities in the language classroom such as discussions, role play, written exercises, etc. Ideally, a PEPA comes from a "twist" on an activity that would already be present in the lessons. The authors reinforce the importance of familiarity when choosing classroom activities that would be adequate to the work for understanding. They argue that activities should be "tried and trusted by everyone concerned" because "why incur the extra stress of doing a new activity if an old one will do? That said, the range of PEPAS is limited only by the imagination." (ALLWRIGHT, HANKS, 2009, p. 193).

Allwright (2003) adds that Exploratory Practice should be a sustainable enterprise, and not a classroom project. That way, the work for understanding would be integrated to classroom life and ultimately contribute to the *quality of life*

in the classroom. It is important to note here that *quality of life* is not to be judged as good or bad. All is to be understood and observed. Exploratory Practice may show a connection with traditional research paradigms in the sense that it is about the *facts*. It is about that specific reality and we will not add extra elements before trying to know what is going on in that situation (CUNHA, 2019 [personal communication]).

Allwright and Hanks (2009) remind us that, traditionally, classroom research is viewed as highly demanding of time and energy. If we think of a teacher's routine, we know that there is rarely any spare time between lesson planning, lessons themselves, assignment correction and so on. In that sense, the 'solution' for the problem of wasting precious class time has been to place research into time-limited projects, so that teachers can focus their energy for a given period of time, knowing that, in the end, they will 'go back' to their routines.

Alternatively, according to Allwright and Hanks (2009), Exploratory Practice should be about teachers and students working together towards understandings of what is relevant to them, in a way that differs from other participatory research proposals, such as Action Research, because the starting point is not *changing*, but *working for understanding*. The difference between Action Research and Exploratory Practice is that the former starts with an intention to change or solve the problem. Instead, in EP, if the investigation suggests there is need for change, then Action Research will be necessary. The authors propose the use of "normal pedagogic practices as investigative tools, so that 'working for understanding' is part of the teaching and learning, not extra to it" and that the work remains sustainable and does not function as a project (ALLWRIGHT, HANKS, 2009, p. 166/167). To sum up, the authors add that the work for understanding should be so that it contributes to "*teaching and learning themselves*" and to "*development, both individual and collective*" (id, p. 167).

2.1.1. Seven principles of Exploratory Practice

In 2003, Allwright defined the seven principles of Exploratory Practice, and, in his work with Hanks (2009), he reiterates that EP opens channels between teachers and their learners. I could not agree more since my brief experience of sharing

puzzles with students at various ages and proficiency levels has paved the path for many interesting questionings, both mine and theirs. The seven principles for Exploratory Practice are put as principles for “inclusive practitioner research” (ALLWRIGHT, HANKS, 2009 p. 260):

The ‘what’ issues

1. Focus on *quality of life* as the fundamental issue.
2. Work to *understand* it, before thinking about solving problems.

The ‘who’ issues

3. Involve *everybody* as practitioners developing their own understandings
4. Work to bring people *together* in a common enterprise.
5. Work cooperatively for *mutual* development.

The ‘how’ issues

6. Make it a *continuous* enterprise.
7. *Minimize the burden* by integrating the work for understanding into normal pedagogic practice.

As of 2020, there is a discussion going on whether the principles should be numbered or not. I will be using the numbers to create a clear and easy reference to each principle, yet I would like to call attention to the fact that the numbering does not reflect any kind of hierarchy or order on when/how to adopt them.

According to Principle 1, we should consider quality of life in the classroom as key to our work with students, instead of control. This is different from the traditional view, which gives emphasis to measurable results, such as test scores. My understanding is that exploratory practitioners believe that if we focus on quality of life, the “rest” will follow. By “rest”, I mean here all things that educational institutions, especially language courses, claim as result: language fluency and grammar accuracy. It was hard for me to accept this at first, because it seemed unreasonable not to focus the work on measurable results. However, deeper thinking and reading on the subject led me to understand that it already happens in our classrooms, we just have to see it. This leads to the second principle.

As stated in Principle 2, our work should be towards understanding our reality, and not towards solving problems. Again, this seemed counterproductive to me, at first, because why should we not identify the problems one by one and then seek to solve them? Why is this not the best strategy? Allwright and Hanks argue

that “understanding is a prerequisite to intelligent decision making” (2009, p. 151). They say that understanding in itself is not new to foreign language teaching. The innovation consists in focusing on understanding and not on changing, and realizing that while trying to understand issues in the classroom, teacher and students may already be in a process of change.

In practice, I have seen many “problems” being “solved” throughout the work for understanding. When talking about oral presentations, which will be further explored in the Methodology section, one of my students said she would rather deliver her presentation on her chair, so that she could be at the same level of her classmates. All other students agreed with her. This issue only came up because we were puzzling about the moment of presentations, and, as it turned out, she gave me a “solution” for a “problem” I did not even know I had. Puzzling is asking ‘why’ questions about situations. It is an individual and social activity as well as a curricular activity. As Allwright and Hanks (2009, page 176) put it: “the term ‘puzzle’ represents our concern for developing understandings in relation to issues of immediate interest, whether or not they are ‘problematic’ and whether or not we connect them to theory”. This puzzling moment I just mentioned also relates to Principle 3.

The third principle of Exploratory Practice encourages the involvement of all as specialists in their own learning. Looking at this principle makes me think: what could be more obvious and, at the same time, more innovative? Allwright and Hanks (2009, p. 108) introduce Exploratory Practice as a “fully inclusive research model that engages learners, with their teachers, as practitioner-researchers”. After all, who could possibly know more about their own learning than learners themselves could? The authors say “if anyone needs to understand, then everyone needs to understand” (ALLWRIGHT, HANKS, 2009, p. 151). I say that we should not be viewing students as “objects of study”, but as partners of our work. This is consonant with Principle 4 and Principle 5, because teachers and students are working together towards a common goal, aiming at mutual development.

It is vital that teachers understand that feelings and weaknesses can be shared – because, in fact, teachers and students already know each other’s weaknesses but had had no place to share their feelings (ALLWRIGHT, HANKS, 2009). Teaching can be very lonely. It comes as a relief to think that we teachers are actually not just standing alone in front of our students. On the contrary, we are part of the group, with our strong and weak spots, just like everybody else. We are learners *working together for mutual development*, as stated by Principle 5.

With understanding as a goal, as proposed by Allwright and Hanks (2009) when they say, “[t]he most general purpose [of research] is to develop our understanding of our world. (p. 107)”, how can we view research as having a beginning and an end? This “ambitious” (*ibid*, p. 107) intent leads us to Principle 6 of Exploratory Practice, which says that practitioner research is an ongoing endeavor.

Finally, Principle 7 advocates that we integrate the work for understanding into our teaching practice. If we remain open-minded, almost any classroom situation or syllabus item can turn into an opportunity to understand classroom life. In the 2018.2 term, I taught a group of upper-intermediate teenagers. One of the lessons proposed by the book was called ‘What makes you happy?’ and they were supposed to use the conditional grammar structures to talk about different possibilities in life that would make them happy or happier. I took the opportunity to work on something that had been puzzling me for some time: why were students happy in class? Students came up with thoughts about the school premises, which I had never thought about. The activity addressed one of my puzzles and did not get in the way of “normal” class action.

2.1.2. Five propositions about learners

Allwright and Hanks (2009, p. 4-7) have developed five propositions about learners, remembering that both teachers and students are viewed as learners:

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

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

Proposition 3: Learners are capable of taking learning seriously.

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

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

Allwright and Hanks' comments on Proposition 3 state that teachers tend to think that students do not take learning seriously. They also mention that our ideas about learners come from our own learning experience. I strongly agree, because, whenever I start any activity with my students, I picture myself, at a younger age. I remember that I used to see classroom work as simple tasks that I had to complete as quickly as possible. I would not give much attention to details. I remember not making much effort to do an outstanding job, because an "OK" work would do.

When I look back, at first, I view this attitude as not taking learning seriously. However, I realize now that, in fact, I was unable to see myself as capable to make meaningful contributions to mine and others' learning. Here, I draw a connection with Proposition 5, which provides that "learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning" (ALLWRIGHT, HANKS, 2009 p. 7). Therefore, in the past, I thought I could not take learning seriously and could not contribute to learning processes. As a teacher, I was attached to this set of beliefs when thinking about my students. This automatic comparison I tend to make between my students and myself has already proven itself misleading, as I learn each day that every individual is unique, consonantly with Proposition 1.

A Harvard study (EWERS, 2018) advocates that the secret to happiness is in our relationships. The 75-year-long inquiry correlates high levels of good "quality of life" with genuine good quality human connections. Forming connections is related to the exercise of *positive alacrity*, which is defined as "creating micro-experiences that cause an emotional uplifting in others" (EWERS, 2018).

As I began to observe what happened in my classes, I could see numerous moments of positive alacrity. In one of my beginners' adult classes in the semester 2018.1, we had a spelling activity and I played the alphabet song for us

to sing along. My students were 15-18 years old. We sang the song, finished the activity and went on with the lesson. At the end of the class, one of my students, aged 17, asked me if we could sing the alphabet song again. We did and, then, they left for the day. I was left alone in the classroom, asking myself “Why did she ask me to sing that song again? This song is obviously on YouTube and there is nothing special about it”. Then, I realized that we had created an affective connection with the song and that her request had nothing to do with the song itself, but with the moment that we had just shared.

In my experience, affective connections in a classroom can happen between students and an activity, as in the episode I just mentioned, between students and the teacher, and, of course, between a student and another student. I could link the importance of affective connections to the fact that, as a student, I have always preferred face-to-face classes over online courses. Only now I understand that it is so because of the importance I place in the affective connections made in the classroom.

I have also always been concerned with human connections during my professional life, but I could not link this concern in a “logical” way with the effectiveness and productiveness associated with professional activities. It was only possible for me to make this connection after I was introduced to the concept of *affect*.

2.2. Affect

In her 1999 text, *A map of the terrain*, Jane Arnold explores the relationship between cognition and affect, citing various works where the two are inseparably connected. She also reviews the concepts of anxiety, inhibition, extroversion-introversion, self-esteem and finally motivation, and their relationship with learning according to different authors. In her conclusion, she recognizes that language teachers already have many things to worry about, however adding *affect* to the sum “rather than increasing teachers’ burdens, might make attending to the other areas an easier task” (ARNOLD, 1999, p. 24).

Arnold’s and Allwright’s approaches seem to complement each other in the sense that both observing what *affects* our classroom life and working on the

understanding of classroom issues will give us energy rather than drain it. When expanding on the concept of quality of life, Allwright proposes that we can work for a better understanding of our language classroom without letting “the work for understanding itself become a burden to us” (ALLWRIGHT, 2003, p. 6). It is crucial to understand that affect may be positive or negative. As Arnold puts it, “positive affect can provide invaluable support for learning just as negative affect can close down the mind and prevent learning from occurring altogether” (ARNOLD, 2011, p. 1). She continues by making a connection with the metaphor of the affective filter proposed by Krashen (1987).

2.2.1. The affective filter

According to Krashen, the affective filter is “an impediment to learning acquisition caused by negative affective responses to one’s environment” (KRASHEN, 1987, p. 16). He hypothesizes that emotions such as anxiety, self-doubt and even boredom function as a filter in the process of acquiring a second language. I really like this metaphor because I often have the impression of there being an imaginary fog preventing my students from perceiving and capturing the language inputs in class. I can see remarkable contrasts between different groups of students, and I will share below a quick description of two different groups of students as an attempt to illustrate my impressions regarding the affective filter.

I have worked with a group of teenagers aged 14 to 16 years old. All were high school students and lived in Vidigal and Rocinha, where the institution I worked for is located. They could (and did) get distracted during class by topics of their everyday life, which were not connected to the lesson topic from the course book. They would speak Portuguese very often during our classes. If one were to assess their attitudes in class using a checkbox scheme like the one used to assess teachers (Table 1, which I will analyze in the next section) they would be likely to receive a low mark. However, it is clear to me and I am confident it would be to anyone who entered my classroom with an open mind and open heart, that these students took their learning very seriously. They were the best performing students I have ever had at the institution. When they got distracted, all I had to do was choose how I would connect the subject they were talking about with the

topic of the lesson. Whenever I showed them a picture in the book, for example, it was easy to trigger discussion because they made a genuine effort to have a position, it did not matter the subject.

Each one of the six teenagers had a unique personality. Having had the privilege of working with them for three semesters, I saw that they worked together as a team with an identity of its own. Back to the idea of the affective filter, Krashen alerts us that learners “whose attitudes are not optimal for second language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input, but they will also have a high or strong affective filter” (1987, p. 31). I see that having a group identity is a factor that lowers these students’ affective filter, as they actively seek for more language input. By knowing their roles within that small learning community, these students seemed to have lowered their affective filters to a point in which the inputs are easily accessible.

On the other hand, in the adult group with which I developed this study and which will be described in this paper, I could observe higher levels of affective filters. Emotions such as anxiety and self-doubt, mentioned by Krashen (1987) may be more present in this group as it is formed by adults, some of whom have finished their studies many years ago. I will describe this group with further detail in my Methodology section, but, for now, it is interesting to notice the contrast between them and my teenage group when observing the formation of a group identity. While the teenagers have managed to find their roles in the group, as mentioned before, the adults have a harder time, and this may be due to factors which come with age, such as having more responsibilities in life and, thus, having less time to bond with classmates.

2.3. Assessment

Allwright and Hanks remind us that not only students but also teachers have their performance assessed by an external evaluator or higher ranked/head teacher. These assessments are carried out for the sake of “quality control, with the emphasis here on ‘control’” (ALLWRIGHT, HANKS, 2003, p. 33). At the school where I work, we are evaluated using a checkbox scheme similar to the replica below.

Instructor's fluency	VG	G	R	N/A
Use of the target language during the entire lesson	VG	G	R	N/A
General Comments:				

Table 1 – Adapted from the document used by an English course to evaluate teachers' performance

For each item, the evaluator (head teacher) must assign a mark, the scale being VG (very good), G (good), R (regular) and N/A (not applicable). At the bottom, there is a box for general comments. As we can see, these items do not consider the context of the lesson. For instance, if teachers decide to use the mother tongue in a specific moment of the lesson, they run the risk of being penalized with a lower mark on the evaluation, depending on the head teacher's discretion. The teacher being evaluated may as well not remember specific vocabulary, risking, then, to be penalized on fluency. These assessment tools often place a huge amount of pressure on teachers, who make an effort to act according to the procedures in order to "do well" in the assessments. Many times during my experience, I have seen that following the procedures does not reflect on a more valuable experience for learners. I have witnessed teachers who use our mother tongue (Portuguese) in specific moments in order to clarify students' doubts. Their approach was often seen as "lazy" and "unproductive" because students were not using English only. In my view they were, however, building rich connections with the target language using the mother tongue repertoire that students already had in their minds.

When introducing different forms of assessment, Allwright and Hanks (2009) also suggest self-assessment and assert that students may be able to judge their own performance. The authors say that learners can be harsher on themselves than teachers would, especially adults. My upper intermediate students, in the semester 2018.2, were harsh on themselves when they told me they were not able to deliver oral presentations. I decided to keep things as planned and have them prepare and deliver the presentations previewed by the course syllabus.

One of the students, Paula, had great difficulty in expressing herself orally during class. She would often feel shy and discouraged because she could not find the words to say what she wanted to say. Paula chose to talk about racism in one of her oral presentations. She narrated the routine of her son, a 14-year-old black boy. When talking about this meaningful topic, she was able to maintain the flow of the narrative coherently, using vocabulary and verb tenses that I had not thought she knew. This example, and many others, leads me to agree with Allwright and Hanks (2009) when they say that students underestimate their own capacities. I would add that it is not only the students who underestimate themselves, but also the course – by proposing that teachers follow strict instructions from teachers' guides; the teacher – by attempting to control every step of the lesson; the family, external assessment institutions, governmental institutions, etc. Thus, self-assessment seems to be an interesting option because it is a possibility for an autonomous attitude, where students may review their own negative and positive assets.

It turned out that not only Paula, but other students performed much better in the oral presentations than in the regular oral activities. In their presentations, students could find resources to express themselves and tell their stories. This fact puzzled me, and I found that, in a way, it puzzled my students too. The puzzles were part of our work for understanding in that classroom. In the next section, I will describe the environment, these puzzles about the presentations and the understandings that came from them.

3. Methodology and Analysis

3.1. The language course and the learners

As briefly mentioned in the Review of Literature, the language course I work for operates in a franchising system. Everything, from the school layout to how teachers are supposed to teach their lessons, must be standardized according to what is set by the franchise based in Rio de Janeiro. It is worth noting here that Allwright and Hanks (2009) make a difference between *standardization* and *standards*.

The notion of *standardization* connects to the ideas of “universalism and competitive individualism” (ALLWRIGHT, HANKS, 2009, p. 21). This is the notion that permeates the franchising system: all learners receive the same “input”: contents in the book and teacher conduct; in similar premises, classrooms are all arranged similarly, even walls and fixtures’ colors are to be the same in every branch. Thus, all learners are expected to reach the same “outcome”: measurable amounts of language learning. Alternatively, Allwright and Hanks (2009) propose a definition for *standards* which would fit into the Five Propositions about Learners, defended by the two authors in the same book. For Allwright and Hanks, “learners who take learning seriously will want to reach as high a *standard* as they can manage”, and they will “work together willingly in a mutually supportive manner towards their different individual target *standards*” (ALLWRIGHT, HANKS, 2009, p. 21). The work for understanding developed in class and described in this paper seems to me as a way of achieving the highest standards. This will be further explored later in the text. Besides the standardization required by the franchise, there are other aspects worth noting about the school.

The branch where I work is located at the edge of Rocinha – Rio de Janeiro. The slum area is home for 69,356 people according to the latest population census by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2010). However, informal sources among the area inhabitants account for a population of more than 150,000. A comprehensive study by IBGE, based on the data from the same 2010 census, has described all of Brazil slum areas, or squatter settlements

(*aglomerados subnormais*, in Portuguese). These are defined as groups of dwellings unorderedly located on land currently or until recently owned by the state or other private individual which is not the inhabitant, and that lack essential public services (IBGE, 2010). Rocinha is Latin America's largest squatter settlement. It is also the most densely populated area in the city of Rio de Janeiro, with impressive 48,258 residents per square kilometer (Instituto Pereira Passos, 2018). In contrast, the average population density in Rio de Janeiro is 5,556 people per square kilometer (IBGE, 2018).

These figures lead to some reflection on the inhabitants' lifestyle. Lack of space permeates people's routines and it is present at the language course where I used to teach. Rocinha sits on a steep area and most buildings have two or more floors with no space between them. The course is located in a four-story building, occupying part of the first and second floors. Entering through a glass door, there is a reception counter and a small space by the window where students wait for their classes sitting on the four chairs available, or just standing. This area gets very crowded especially in the evenings, when more classes are held at the same time. During a discussion in one of my 2018.2 classes, some teen students lamented not having more space to hang out before and after classes. There are seven classrooms in the premises, five of which are on the second floor of the building. They are approximately 3 meters wide and 3 meters long. Each room accommodates twelve student chairs. The size of the classrooms, more than any other institutional parameter, determines the maximum size of groups at the Rocinha branch – 12 students, whereas the minimum size (4 students) is defined by commercial reasons. Chairs are normally arranged in a "U" shape so that the teacher can circulate among students.



Image 1 – Squatter settlement of Rocinha, made up mostly of buildings of two or more floors, accessed by narrow alleys and lanes. Inhabitants get around mostly on foot/bicycle (IBGE, 2010). View from Dois Irmãos hill in photo taken by the author in July 2018.

The school has approximately 300 students, mostly teenagers and young adults at elementary and pre-intermediate level, but there are classes of other levels and age groups. Each group has 4 to 12 students, who come twice a week for lessons that last 75 minutes. The course proposes addressing the so called four linguistic abilities: Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking. During each lesson, the emphasis should always be on Speaking, since the course is said to follow the Communicative Approach. However, from intermediate levels onwards, students are required to produce a written composition after each class, as homework. In one semester, each student writes an average of 20 essays, mostly argumentative. These compositions are part of the students' assessment. According to the Teacher's Guide, there should be moments in class to discuss these assignments with students. In reality, teachers grade the compositions,

make written comments on the text structure and grammatical aspects at home and give them back to students. In my experience, students' written production ends up not receiving so much attention because of the volume of grading that teachers have to deal with. Recently, the adult elementary and pre-intermediate level course books have been replaced and the amount of compositions per semester reduced to four or five. This change had not yet reached intermediate and higher levels as of 2018. Attendance and class interaction are also considered for the final grade. The majority of the marks, however, comes from two written exams and one oral exam at the end of the semester. For intermediate and higher levels, students are also required to prepare and deliver oral presentations. The work with these oral presentations will be a central issue in this paper and will be analyzed in the next chapters.

February 2016 marked the start of my teaching journey at this institution. Since then, I have had classes in all age groups, from eight-year-old kids to adults, at all levels of proficiency. During the 2018.2 term, I worked with a group of intermediate to upper intermediate learners. They were six female young adults, aged 15 to 34, who came to a 75-minute-class every Monday and Wednesday at 7.30 PM – the last class of the day at the course. I will be using fictitious names for the students. Their level of proficiency varied: the 15-year-old, Haryane, had been studying English for a longer period of time and was able to work with complex grammar structures and verb tenses. She could talk about complex concrete and abstract topics. Graziela, aged 26, could communicate most of her ideas successfully, but would make a number of grammar mistakes in spoken and written discourse. Juliana, aged 20, had more difficulty to express her own thoughts in English but could understand complex structures. Paula, aged 34, would make numerous grammar mistakes but was very competent in conveying her message. Marilene, aged 28, had had little opportunity to study English during her school years. Her hard work at the English course had made her able to express some ideas in English after three years of study. I had personally seen her progress because I had been her teacher in 2016, when she started the course. The same applies to Érica, aged 34, who would have a hard time forming sentences, especially in written form. It is important to highlight that all of them

had made great progress throughout the semester. I had had the opportunity to work with some of them in previous semesters, so I am confidently able to say that all of them progressed, within their own limitations, in 2018-2. At the end of that semester, besides having shown an improvement in their argumentative capacities especially through the oral presentations and discussions, some of the students had significantly evolved in their written performance. Paula shifted from writing loose sentences to coherently expressing an idea, and the same happened to Marilene. Érica started writing texts which made more sense.

3.2. The oral presentations

The intermediate level books used in the course require students to prepare four oral presentations throughout the semester. The group of students I described in the previous section took the second of these intermediate levels in 2018-2. Since the beginning of the semester, I noticed that the four oral presentations were the activities that would generate the most nervousness among them. Students had to prepare presentations, which would last 3 to 5 minutes, about topics suggested by the book, which were connected to the topics discussed during regular classes, and perform them in front of all students. I instructed them to prepare their presentations in bullet points so that they could talk about the topics and not read a text. I did not demand a PowerPoint presentation, but said they could have one if they wanted to. In Table 2, there are the topics proposed by the book and my comments about how I approached each one with this group of students. All of the students were excited about the topics proposed for the first presentation (social issues). They quickly chose one of the topics as soon as we read them from the book. The topics proposed for the second presentation (making changes in your life) generated some doubts so we took a few moments to discuss them before they chose one. Students thought that the topics for the third presentation were dull (unexpected things that happen when traveling). The students and I decided then to have the third presentation in a different format, as will be better described below. The topics for the fourth presentation (different types of pollution) seemed distant to some students, but others could connect them with their reality. Haryane, for instance, talked about the floods in Rio de Janeiro and their relationship with water pollution.

Presentation	Topic proposed by the course book	My comments
1 st	<i>Social issues.</i> Topics suggested: Poverty; Discrimination; Unemployment; Environmental Pollution and Alcohol Abuse.	The students and I decided that they would be free to deliver presentations about other social issues. They were expected to talk about the social issue and come up with ideas to address the matter. It was done individually.
2 nd	<i>Making changes in your life.</i> Topics suggested: taking part in a student exchange program; Moving to a relative's house; Studying/Working out of your hometown; Moving to a new neighborhood/city; Enrolling in a new course; Studying abroad.	Students were expected to talk about the pros and cons of such life changes, and the impact that these changes might have in their lives. They had to talk about situations that they had already experienced or hypothetical situations. It was also done individually.
3 rd	<i>Unexpected things that happen when traveling.</i> Topics suggested: losing your luggage/cell phone/passport/money; having problems with hotel reservations; having problems with the quality of accommodation; finding out that everything was more expensive than you had planned.	Students had to talk about their experience or about a hypothetical situation. For this presentation, I suggested that they prepared a role play situation, acted it out and then had a discussion about it with the group. The third presentation was done in pairs.
4 th	<i>Different types of pollution</i> Topics suggested: soil pollution; water pollution; littering; air pollution; visual contamination; light pollution; noise pollution and radioactive contamination.	Students were expected to choose one of the topics to talk about. It was done individually.

Table 2 – Presentation topics

As a group, my students and I agreed that it would be important to deliver the presentation by talking about the subject, and not by reading a text in front of the class. In that sense, we discussed and reinforced the importance of having notes organized in bullet points to guide the presentations.

I took notes during the presentations for later feedback in which I highlighted a few aspects of students' performances.

First Presentation – Social Issues

In the first presentation, there were four students who could deliver the presentation by talking and not reading a text. Haryane, Graziela, Julia and Paula used different strategies to convey their ideas and engage the audience. Both Haryane and Graziela talked about education and racial discrimination. They could competently engage their audience (the other students and I) by stating what they would talk about in the beginning of the presentation. This created expectations in the audience, which were fulfilled as they covered the topics they had proposed. Neither of them had a PowerPoint presentation as guidance, but had some notes on a piece of paper. Julia had her topics on a PowerPoint slide. She read each one and briefly talked about it, but could not build expectation in the audience because she did not make a general introduction in the beginning of the presentation. Paula, who had difficulty in expressing herself orally during classes, surprised me when talking about racial discrimination, as mentioned earlier in section 2.3. She shared a personal story about her feelings and fears towards her black 14-year-old son walking alone in the streets of Rocinha. This brought the topic alive and engaged the other students in a discussion.

Marilene and Érica made a huge effort to speak only English during the presentation. They were the students who presented most difficulty when expressing themselves orally during class, so even though they could not deliver the presentation without reading their notes, they were able to do it all in English. Érica read her notes, making an effort to speak only English during the presentation. Marilene used a poster as a guide for her presentation, also reading what was on it.

All students had already told me that they felt nervous and uneasy during presentations. In the beginning of the semester, they made comments about the difficulties of delivering presentations in the previous semester. In this first presentation, all of them said that they had been nervous too, and that they did not like the activity. What I could notice, however, is that once they started talking, their overall oral performance was much better than in our day-to-day class activities. Before starting their presentation, all students, except for Graziela,

showed that they were uncomfortable about the activity. Graziela studied Journalism in college, worked as an intern in a big company, and said that speaking in public was not a problem for her. The other girls all complained about having to stand up in front of the class for the presentation. However, once they started talking, their nervousness seemed to decrease, which I think contributed to their performance being better than in regular class discussions. Nevertheless, they often had to stop a few times during the presentations to “catch their breath” before continuing to speak.

Unfortunately, I could not make time to deliver feedback after this first presentation. I managed to do it only after the second presentation, as described below.

Second Presentation – Making changes in your life

A month later, students delivered their second presentation. Haryane and Graziela could again create expectation in the audience in the beginning of their presentations. Graziela said she would talk about two different topics and Haryane said she would talk about advantages and disadvantages of making changes in your life. Neither one of them had PowerPoint presentations nor posters. They could develop their topics with fluency and minor grammar mistakes. Juliana had slides with bullet points for her presentation, just like in the first one. She ended up only reading some of her items and not going deep into each topic.

Érica and Marilene had a surprising performance in this presentation. Érica had a list of topics about making changes in life and commented them freely in English, without reading from a text. This was remarkable considering her usual performance in regular class discussions, when she would usually make short comments, although always making efforts to speak English. In Marilene's turn to present, her cell phone ran out of battery, and her notes were in the phone. She bravely delivered the presentation without her notes, and brought the topic alive by telling her own story about life changes. She talked about when she moved from the northeastern state of Paraíba to Rio de Janeiro. Her narrative was detailed and personal. She was able to use different verb tenses and we

could see that she could find much vocabulary within her repertoire, which did not often happen during class discussions. Both Érica and Marilene made great effort to speak English during the whole time.

Once again, I could observe that all students were able to express themselves much more richly in the presentations than in regular classes. This is why I decided to share my impressions with them.

After the first two presentations, I provided the students' with oral feedback based on all the notes described above. I told them how I thought they were able to tell stories and express their opinions using different verb tenses and grammatical structures. I told them that even though they claimed that presentations made them uncomfortable, what I had seen were moments in which they looked for different communicative resources in order to convey their message. Stewick's (1976) ideas relate closely to these presentations when he talks about *productive performance*. According to him, students perform productively when they in fact have something to say to a specific audience. Still according to Stewick (1976, p. 107), the student "draws on the models that are available within himself, in order to fulfill his purpose". I believe this was because all of them could use the moment of the presentation as an opportunity to talk about topics that were meaningful for their/our reality. My feedback seemed to surprise them in a positive way. This is consonant with Allwright and Hanks (2009), who state that students tend to underestimate their own capacities.

Third Presentation – Travel Trouble

The third presentation was quite different from the other ones. The pairs Haryane & Marilene, Graziela & Juliana and Érica & Paula prepared a script and role-played a travel trouble situation in front of the class. Haryane & Marilene and Graziela & Juliana could perform the whole situation without reading their script. Érica and Paula read their lines. After the performance, students conducted an activity about the dialog they had just performed. The result was not so remarkable as in the first presentations, because the dialogs had been scripted, so there was not much room for discussion. But it was very creative and showed independence and agency.

At the end of the presentation, Juliana questioned the fact that the presentations were done in pairs. This puzzle was the starting point for the moments for understanding described in section 3.3.



Image 2 – Students conducting and participating in activity after the third presentation, which was a role play.

Fourth Presentation – Different types of pollution

In the fourth presentation, Haryane brought pictures to talk about water pollution. She talked through the whole presentation fluently. Similarly, Graziela could answer questions and discuss her subjects, although she used some notes from her cell phone.

Paula talked about air pollution and made a few grammar mistakes, likewise Érica, who brought a poster about visual contamination. Similarly to the previous presentations, Juliana used slides to talk about her topic. She read part of the

text from her slides. Lastly, Marilene talked about light pollution by reading some information on her poster.

The fourth presentation did not seem to bring such interesting interactive moments as the first ones.

3.3. Moments for understanding

After the third presentation, Juliana questioned the fact that the presentations were done in pairs or individually. This was the starting point of my first “hands on” activity to try to understand our puzzles around the oral presentations. I wrote the question ‘*Why do we prefer to do our presentations individually/in pairs?*’ and asked them to write what they thought about it on a piece of paper. The pieces of paper were pasted by all of us on a poster. All comments made by the students are transcribed in Table 3 below. I believe that their comments reflect their understanding of the puzzle. No grammar corrections were made at this point.

Sometimes, interesting questions will come spontaneously from learners. According Allwright and Hanks (2009, p. 177), it is important that the teacher is open to questions: “teachers must notice that learners are seriously questioning something they would like to understand better”.

If it were not for my previous knowledge about Exploratory Practice, I would never have thought of the aforementioned puzzle to be worth investigating. When I was a young learner, I had the belief that all things had already been thoroughly thought of before they were brought into the classroom. All activities, texts, approaches, ideas, everything should have been so carefully planned and considered beforehand that there would be no room for questioning. Therefore, any questioning that I might have was irrelevant. I used to be unable to see that things were not static and permanent, yet now I see that everything is under a continuous process of rethinking and, eventually, improving.

This notion that things were permanent – and somewhat perfect – has permeated all my life. It has been a strong belief that, if someone had “put it there” (meaning if someone had said or done something), they must have thought it through exhaustively so there would be absolutely no room for questioning. My

experience as a teacher has helped me to see that there will always be imperfection and room for questioning, and that this is normal and healthy. This brings us back to the relevance of Juliana's question that generated the puzzle on which we all worked.



Image 3 – Students reflecting and putting together a poster

Why do we prefer to do our presentations individually/in pairs?
I prefer individually because I have more shame with other people. (Paula)
I prefer individual because can search information and topics, learned about the topics, and can use your creativity. But in pairs is important, because can use the friend for help you. We can learn more topics, talking about. (Marilene)
I prefer: individually! I don't have problems with other humans; I do my work my way; I do my work in my time. (Juliana)
I prefer individual presentation but I know that in pair there are more possibility of the creativity. (Paula)
I prefer the individual presentation because I can choose what I want to talk. But I also liked to do the presentation in pairs because we were able to share ideas and had more fun. This really made me feel less ashamed. (Haryane)
[I prefer in pairs] because in pairs my creative can be more interesting for class. (Érica)
When we work in pairs, can do questions and discuss about the things. The presentation could be more dynamic. If you work alone, have more things to do and to learn. Do presentations individually is more boring. Learn with ourself + learn with classmate. (Graziela)
I think we could do the presentations on our chairs so that everybody is on the same level (Juliana)

Table 3: Understandings for 'Why do we prefer to do our presentations individually/in pairs?' (first poster)

After the fourth presentation, I brought the poster back to class and I explained to them that the question was a puzzle that had come to my mind in the beginning of the semester, and that we had been working on it together. I told them that this was part of my work for my postgraduate course at PUC.

Then, we had an open discussion about our impressions on the presentations throughout the semester. Students wrote their impressions and pasted them on another poster under the question: '*Why do/don't we like our presentations?*'. This was in fact what had been puzzling me since the beginning of the semester. The understandings from this second puzzle are transcribed in Table 4 below. Again, no grammar corrections were made at this point.

Why do/don't we like our presentations?
I like my presentation, because I love to talk in public. When I know about the topic, I don't see a problem in speak. (Marilene)
I like do presentation because is the moment that you can practice the language (talking about when we are learning English for example) I think that presentation is good for learning and study. (Graziela)
I like all presentation because the topics is very interesting and my friends speak very well!! (Érica)
I don't like my presentation because: the peoples are looking at me; I don't remember words/verbs I like my presentation because: I love to talk about the topic; I like explain; I like uses charts and photos (Juliana)
I don't like to talk in public, but when we do our presentations and interact with each other I feel good (Haryane)
I didn't like my presentation because there are many eyes in my direction, what makes me very nervous. I like to talk in my chair, sit, because everyone are in the same level. (Paula)
I don't like my presentation, but I like the moment. (Paula-orally)
I use my extroverted personality to talk during the presentation. (Érica-orally)
I prefer to deliver presentations in Portuguese. My problem is that in English I don't know the words. (Marilene-orally)

Table 4: understandings to '*Why do/don't we like our presentations?*' (second poster)

These activities, according to the ideas in Exploratory Practice, are a chance for students to write in English about issues that are relevant to them. "Exploratory Practice involves practitioners working collegially to understand what they want to understand, following their *own* agendas (ALLWRIGHT, HANKS, 2009, p. 166)". Students could write about what puzzled them in relation to the

presentations, and they also helped me understand my own puzzle. Their thoughts paved a path for an understanding of why they preferred working individually and in pairs, and of why they liked or disliked the presentations. These activities are examples of Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs).

Afterwards, I united the two posters into one for the event promoted by the *Especialização em Língua Inglesa* graduate course on December 4, 2018. This is a diploma course at PUC-Rio where most of the students are EFL teachers. Part of the course is dedicated to Exploratory Practice, and this event is for student-teachers to present the work they develop with their students. In the event, the EFL teachers, who are students at the graduate course, showcase their experiences at their classrooms in form of posters. At the event, I talked to the participants about the work I had done with my students, and it was a chance for me to reflect upon my data. I will develop some of the reflections below.

3.4. Analysis

In this section, I will first look into the collected data and draw elements mentioned by students to support their points of view. After that, I will draw connections with theory and seek new understandings from what the students have said. I will use the theoretical background of Exploratory Practice and the Five Propositions about learners, which are on pages 4 to 7 of Allwright and Hanks' 2009 *The Developing Language Learner*, already quoted numerous times in this work. For the sake of fluency in the text, I will not repeat the source in every quotation.

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

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

Proposition 3: Learners are capable of taking learning seriously.

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

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

I dedicate the next two sections to the analysis of each of the puzzles.

3.4.1. *Why do we prefer to do our presentations individually/in pairs?*

For the first puzzle (*Why do we prefer to do our presentations individually/in pairs?*) all of students' understandings are in Table 3 (Section 3.3). In Table 5 below, I have drawn elements mentioned by students that support their view on why they prefer individual or pair presentations. In the third column is which of the proposition relates to the elements brought up by students.

Preference:	Reason:	Theory:
Individual presentations	working in own way/time	Proposition 1
	shame of working with other people	Proposition 2*
	avoiding problems with other people	
	learning (more) about topics	Propositions 3 and 4
	use of creativity	
	individual choice of topic	Propositions 1, 3 and 4

Pair presentations	discussing about things	Proposition 2
	using help from friends	
	sharing ideas	
	having more fun	
	feeling less ashamed	
	learning with yourself and with classmate	Propositions 2 and 3
	dynamic presentation	Proposition 5
* the students (Paula and Juliana) are in <u>opposition</u> with Proposition 2. This will be further explored below		

Table 5: Elements mentioned by students in the first second puzzle, and connection with the five propositions.

Using Table 5 as a guide, I will bring the quotes from students and explore the connections between their statements and the five propositions about learners.

Proposition 1 about learners suggests that “learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own unique idiosyncratic ways”. Consonantly, two students strongly argue in favor of their individual choices for learning:

I prefer: individually! I don't have problems with other humans; I do my work my way; I do my work in my time. (Juliana)

I prefer the individual presentation because I can choose what I want to talk. (...)
(Haryane)

Learners, as social beings, profit from a “mutually supportive environment”, says Proposition 2. However, Paula and Juliana mention negative aspects of working with other people.

I prefer individually because I have more shame with other people. (Paula)

I prefer: individually! I don't have problems with other humans; I do my work my way; I do my work in my time. (Juliana)

Paula says she prefers to work individually because she is ashamed of other people. Unfortunately, we did not have time in class to explore exactly what she meant by saying this. Nevertheless, it seems like an opposition to Proposition 2, which is also voiced by Juliana when she says that she prefers individual work because then she would not have problems with other people.

On the other hand, Haryane's and Graziela's understandings are representative of students profiting from a mutually supportive environment. They bring up the ideas shown in Table 5 (above): *discussing about things, sharing ideas, having more fun, feeling less ashamed and learning with yourself and the classmate*. These ideas explain how they view pair work. Their words are quoted below:

(...) But I also liked to do the presentation in pairs because we were able to share ideas and had more fun. This really made me feel less ashamed. (Haryane)

When we work in pairs, can do questions and discuss about the things. The presentation could be more dynamic. (...) Learn with ourself + learn with classmate. (Graziela)

In spite of arguing in favor of individual work, Marilene also points out positive aspects of pair work which relate to Proposition 2: she says that she can *use the help from friends and learn by talking about topics* as quoted below:

I prefer individual (...). But in pairs is important, because can use the friend for help you. We can learn more topics, talking about. (Marilene)

Consonantly with Proposition 3, which says learners are capable of taking learning seriously, students say that individual work provides the chance of *learning more about topics, using creativity and choosing what they wanted to talk about*. These elements also relate to Proposition 4, which claims that students are capable of independent decision-making. When pointing out the advantages of pair work, still consonantly with Proposition 3, Graziela mentions that she *learns with herself as well as with classmates*. We can see these elements in the quotes below:

I prefer individual because can search information and topics, learned about the topics, and can use your creativity. (...) (Marilene)

I prefer the individual presentation because I can choose what I want to talk. (...) (Haryane)

When we work in pairs, can do questions and discuss about the things. The presentation could be more dynamic. (...) Learn with ourself + learn with classmate. (Graziela)

Finally, Proposition 5 argues that learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning. Graziela mentions that presentations in pairs could be more *dynamic*, showing her reflection about how learning takes place. Juliana expands the scope of the discussion when she says:

I think we could do the presentations on our chairs so that everybody is on the same level (Juliana)

For me, her statement is a representation of Proposition 5 about learners because she could reflect on the context of the presentation and come up with an idea for a new setting based on her experience. She explained that she considered it more productive for the person giving the presentation to be sitting down together with the other students, and not standing in front of the class like a teacher in a regular class arrangement.

3.4.2. Why do/don't we like our presentations?

When working on the second puzzle (*Why do/don't we like our presentations?*), students generally pointed out positive aspects of the activity itself but mentioned the challenges of speaking in public. Their understandings of this puzzle are all in Table 4.

In Table 6 below, I have collected elements mentioned by students and clustered them according to the Proposition it relates to. When looking at what students have said for this puzzle, I considered it harder than in the previous puzzle to put the elements in categories. Therefore, I see this Table 6 as just a possibility of reflecting on the collected data.

Preference:	Reason:	Theory:
Like the presentations	talking in public	Proposition 1*
	using extroverted personality	

	friends speak very well	Proposition 2
	interaction	
	practicing the language	Propositions 3 and 5
	learning and studying	
	interesting topics	
	talking about the topic	
	explaining	
Do not like the presentations	using charts and photos	
	talking in public	Proposition 1*
	being watched by many people	Proposition 2**
	not remembering vocabulary	Proposition 3
<p>* students have mentioned “talking in public” in negative and positive ways. This will be further explored below.</p> <p>** in opposition to Proposition 2. This will be further explored below.</p>		

Table 6: Elements mentioned by students in the second puzzle, and connection with the five propositions.

Again, using Table 6 as a guide, I have clustered students' statements and made considerations using the propositions about learners.

First, looking at all elements mentioned by students in Table 6, we see Proposition 1 shining through: each of the students had a unique view on why they liked or disliked the presentations, showing to be “unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own unique idiosyncratic ways”. While Marilene says she likes her presentation because she loves to talk in public, Haryane puts it clearly that she does not like to talk in public, but likes the interaction with other students, as quoted below:

I like my presentation, because I love to talk in public. When I know about the topic, I don't see a problem in speak. (Marilene)

I don't like to talk in public, but when we do our presentations and interact with each other I feel good. (Haryane)

Proposition 2 about learners (learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment) finds support in the voices from Érica and Haryane:

I like all presentation because the topics is very interesting and my friends speak very well!! (Érica)

I don't like to talk in public, but when we do our presentations and interact with each other I feel good. (Haryane)

Both of them place an important role on interaction when they describe the moment of the presentations. The 'learning' and 'development' mentioned in Proposition 2 could also comprise the more negative impressions, such as when Juliana and Paula say they do not like their presentations because there are people looking at them.

By mentioning elements such as *practicing, learning, explaining* and *topics* while sharing their impressions on the oral presentations, students show that they are able to take learning seriously, as suggested by Proposition 3.

When Graziela shares her impressions about the presentations, she also shows that she can develop as a practitioner of learning, as stated by Proposition 5. She connects the moment of the presentations with her own learning by saying:

I like do presentation because is the moment that you can practice the language (talking about when we are learning English for example) I think that presentation is good for learning and study. (Graziela)

Likewise, Marilene reflects on her own learning, as quoted below:

I prefer to deliver presentations in Portuguese. My problem is that in English I don't know the words. (Marilene)

Paula also stands as a practitioner of learning when she resents the fact that she had to stand up in front of the class to give her presentation. She brings back Juliana's suggestion (page 41) that it would be good to talk from her chair so everyone in class would be on the same level.

Developing these activities has only been a small part of the transformation I have seen in my professional life since I came across the concepts of Affect and Exploratory Practice. Below, I will talk about what this experience has meant to me and about my thoughts for the future.

4. Final Considerations

Whenever I start any activity with my students, I automatically picture myself sitting in class and trying to connect with that activity. This automatic comparison is most of the times misleading, as I learn each day that each individual is unique. In that sense, I feel that working continuously to try to understand what goes on in class is a natural consequence of the teaching practice. The work for understanding, supported by Exploratory Practice, has become more and more meaningful to me throughout my journey as an educator.

The group of students with whom I worked in 2018-2 showed that they are able to analyze their own strengths and weaknesses and to place value in the learning opportunities in the classroom. The oral presentations, which were part of the course program and most dreaded by students, were a starting point for fruitful moments of reflection and discussion. At the end, all profited from finding new meanings in the activity. This was visible through discourse.

Allwright and Hanks (2009) establish the difference between Exploratory Practice and Reflective Practice. They argue that EP brings emphasis on inclusivity, mutuality and collaboration and therefore on action for understanding as an integral part of the working lives of learners, as well of teachers. I see that reflecting is crucial, however real life demands movement. Human beings are not and will never be static, and neither should be our attitude as practitioners. Learning and personal development will not happen when standing in the sidelines, yet when stepping in the field and getting the ball moving.

According to Allwright and Hanks (2009) Exploratory Practice is taking *action* for *understanding*. In practice, understandings generated through EP are themselves capable of both producing change and handling the change process. I see that we constantly use (or should use) action for understanding in life. If we do not take the time to understand why something is happening, life may end in a series of attempts to change something where maybe no change was needed at all. However, we are so obsessed with “getting it right” that we keep looking for outside options to “solve” our problems. We all want a prescription. I often see the same situation inside our classrooms. We are so worried with following our

syllabi that we tend to consider it a problem whenever students make us go “out” of our planned agenda. However, they may be in fact forcing us to see what needed to be seen.

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