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**An exploratory and a project-based look to an English
classroom of young learners**



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Monografia apresentada ao programa
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When I enter a classroom, I should be someone who is open to new ideas, open to questions, and open to the curiosities of the students as well as their inhibitions. In other words, I ought to be aware of being a critical and inquiring subject in regard to the task entrusted in me, the task of teaching and not that of transferring knowledge (FREIRE, 1996, p. 47).

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ABSTRACT

Motta, Juliana Mendes; Piedade, Renan Silva da (Advisor). **An Exploratory and a Project-based look to an English classroom of young learners. Rio de Janeiro, 2020.** Monograph – Departamento de Letras, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

Guided by the principles of Exploratory Practice (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009; MILLER, 2013) and of Project-Based Learning (KATZ; CHARD, 1992), the purpose of this research project is to share some reflections about my own professional context, specifically within the project “My backyard is greater than the world”, conducted with a group of very young learners at a private constructivist school in Rio de Janeiro. Given this social context, I decided to register this project through photos and analyze them within qualitative method (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006) with an exploratory and project-based look. In this way, I was able to understand that it is possible to (i) collectively construct some perspectives about language education from a sensitive angle in the process of becoming researchers of our own social matter. In conducting this research, I could also (ii) reflect critically about the idea that research is way more than a final product, (iii) analyze my students’ and colleagues’ contribution to the project problematized in this study, and (iv) promote some reflections regarding the pictures generated to raise awareness about teaching and learning in a situated language classroom.

KEY WORDS: Project-based Learning; Young learners; Exploratory Practice; Collaborative work; Work for understanding.

RESUMO

Motta, Juliana Mendes; Piedade, Renan Silva da (Orientador). **Um olhar exploratório e baseado em projetos para uma sala de aula de Língua Inglesa para jovens alunos**, 2020. Monografia – Departamento de Letras, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

Guiada pelos princípios da Prática Exploratória (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009; MILLER, 2013) e da Aprendizagem Baseada em Projetos (KATZ; CHARD, 1992), o objetivo deste projeto de pesquisa é compartilhar algumas reflexões sobre o meu próprio contexto profissional, especificamente no projeto “Meu quintal é maior que o mundo”, realizado com um grupo de aprendizes muito jovens de uma escola construtivista particular no Rio de Janeiro. Diante desse contexto social, decidi registrar esse projeto por meio de fotos e analisá-las dentro do método qualitativo (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006) com um olhar exploratório e baseado em projetos. Dessa maneira, pude entender que é possível (i) construir coletivamente algumas perspectivas sobre o ensino de idiomas sob um ângulo sensível no processo de nos tornarmos pesquisadores de nossas próprias questões sociais. Ao conduzir esta pesquisa, também pude (ii) refletir criticamente sobre a ideia de que a pesquisa é muito mais que um produto final, (iii) analisar a contribuição de meus alunos e colegas para o projeto problematizado neste estudo, e (iv) promover algumas reflexões sobre as fotos geradas a fim de promover uma conscientização sobre o ensino e a aprendizagem em uma sala de aula de língua situada.

PALAVRAS - CHAVE: Aprendizagem baseada em projetos; Jovens aprendizes; Prática Exploratória; Trabalho colaborativo; Trabalhar para entender.

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1 INTRODUCTION

All of us learn from exchanging and living experiences throughout our lives and I would say that learning is an ongoing process in which every stage matters, especially the first ones, that are responsible for constructing knowledge through experiencing interactions. Simply put, we are talking about foundations that build children's development, social skills, language and learning in a collaborative way.

Although I believe that childhood learning is one of the most important phases of a human being's life, some people tend to get impressed and curious about children being capable of learning, mainly a second language. As a younger learner's teacher, I have always been questioned if it is possible to learn at this very early stage and if it is possible to teach them how to speak and understand in English.

In at least six years of experience, I could observe some parents, educators, scholars and school community underestimate young learners' and their teachers' capacity of learning and teaching. For instance, the use of some repetitive themes and limited vocabulary range in course books and flashcards. Plus, most of the time these themes do not go along with students' lives, interests and previous experiences.

Bringing out my experience, I have been working as an English teacher for eight years and I have been in contact with different methodologies and thoughts towards learning. Currently, I work at a school, whose constructivist project-based approach sees learners as active, potent and constructors of their own knowledge, which is totally different from the other schools I worked before.

From this perspective, this project-based institution has a whole process to choose the project theme, such as a very attentive listening to parents and a very attentive look at what students are bringing as "new" to become a project. In talking about project, the choice comes from constant observations and mutual exchange between students, teachers, coordinators and the principal.

Therefore, there is always a connection with the class needs and interests when choosing a topic to be studied and it is important to mention that very young kids do not choose orally the theme to be investigated. In fact, they demonstrate

on our daily basis through actions, interests and needs their will towards a certain theme.

As a result of these observations, in the second semester of 2019, we (teachers, coordinators, students and principal) chose the project theme that could work on the nature potential. So, as a group work, we read and got inspired by Manoel de Barros' poem "O apanhador de desperdícios" and named the project theme as "My backyard is greater than the world" in order to make a connection with backyard and its natural world as a giant and an open-ended learning laboratory.

Together with the theme, I could see that nature provides countless opportunities for discovery, creativity and hands-on activities. Thus, my students had more opportunities to practice using the language for authentic communication which improve their participation and broaden their vocabulary significantly in real-world life.

Along the year, I noticed that my kids were potent and autonomous not only in my classes, but also in other teachers'. Consequently, the theme of this research came from observations and questions concerning my everyday teaching/learning to help me reflect about my practices. For these reasons, I decided to construct here some reflections through an exploratory and project-based look about my own professional context conducted by me together with a group of very young learners at a private constructivist school in Rio de Janeiro.

So as to bring this understanding to light, I intend to construct a study about my own teaching practice based on the project "My backyard is greater than the world". To conduct this investigation, I registered weekly pedagogical activities through photos (taken by me and by my interns) to analyze our practices (my students' and mine) within the qualitative method (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006), specifically guided by the principles of Exploratory Practice (MILLER, 2013) and of Project-based Learning (KATZ; CHARD, 1992), given their ethical and responsible view towards social practices and research in general (PIEDADE, 2019).

This monograph is divided into five different sections, after this introduction: 2- Theoretical background, where I will talk about Exploratory practice and Project-based Learning, making connections between these two approaches in the learning/teaching process; 3- Methodology, where I will explain my methodologi-

cal procedures and my school context; 4- Data analysis, where I will analyze 10 photos under an Exploratory and a Project-based look; 5-Final considerations, where I will present some of my own understandings based on the whole process of research.

In alignment with Hank's thoughts (2009, p. 40), I believe that the act of being a practitioner researcher and a teacher will promote opportunities to build greater understandings about classroom life and about the process of learning/teaching language to young kids.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section, I intend to bring out some theoretical background which can contribute to the understanding of the issues to be investigated. The first section explains what Exploratory Practice is and what it points out for developing an understanding educational processes and practices. Lastly, the second section presents some notions of Project-based Learning.

2.1 EXPLORATORY PRACTICE

Much has been said about classroom life and its need for reflection, as seen in Silva (2007), Andrade (2014) and Yonezu (2018). Within this huge universe of investigation, one of the contexts we can refer to is language education in relation to ideas about research, learning and teaching (LIMA, 2004; LIBERALI, 2010). In this very same posture, back in the 90's, distancing himself from traditional approaches regarding how classes and research were conducted at schools, Allwright (1990) addresses many of his concerns by bringing another perspective for language teaching/research named Exploratory Practice. He, together with Judith Hanks, understands it as:

a form of inclusive practitioner research in which learners as well as teachers are encouraged to investigate their own learning and teaching practices while currently practicing their target language. (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS 2009, p. 33)

This practice combines research with pedagogy and it can be seen as a way to make teachers as well as learners aware about their own practices/learning. This integration of teaching, learning and research should be relevant to all classroom participants, including teachers, students, supervisors, coordinators and so on. Furthermore, it encourages us to take the pedagogic moments as reflective opportunities to **construct understandings about teaching and/or learning**¹.

¹ For educational purposes and organization, the key concepts about Exploratory Practice will be in bold to understand them better.

Still according to Allwright and Hanks (2009), EP draws the attention to the importance of reflecting about what it is happening in the classroom and in other social contexts. This learning environment is described by the author as complex, in the sense that teachers, coordinators, students and staff should **work to build relationships to enrich themselves as learners (of their own experiences) they all are**. For that reason, it is seen as a dynamic and ongoing process that may suffer changes or not, depending on the actions of its participants, as time goes on.

Aligned with the ideas spread about Exploratory Practice practitioners (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009; MILLER, 2013; PIEDADE, 2019), I strongly believe that **our pedagogic work has to have the understanding and the involvement as the main focus**. In this way, teachers and students who are involved in the process of learning have the chance to discuss life in the classroom and to reflect about their practices, performances and relationships without working for immediate solutions or quantitative results. I would say it allows learners to have their voices heard and also contributes to their development and **autonomy**, in the sense of taking charge of their own learning.

Based on this, it is possible to conclude that the aim of Exploratory Practice is to **foster critical thinking** on the daily routine of teachers and learners who share the same learning environment, but not necessarily the very same experience, given the fact that each individual has his/her own beliefs, expectations and needs. In doing this, they get to **be researchers of their own social matters, both inside and outside classroom, thinking, reflecting and sharing ideas** concerning any event or incident that may happen under a certain context.

Another important aspect of Exploratory Practice is that, through reflection, practitioners are to **be understood as everyday learners who impact, from different angles and with diverse intentions, in the classroom life**. One of the gains of this reflective posture I am talking about is to encourage students and teachers to expose their beliefs in a way that they can interact with each other and, through this, understand and **promote a safe and inclusive pedagogic environment**.

Based on these thoughts, Allwright (2003, p. 128-130) developed some propositions to help EP practitioners in whatever social context they may be inserted. They provide us with a framework to better understand what exploratory

practice is, what our role as a teacher and as student is and what classroom language is. They are not necessarily to be understood as a recipe, but as a **reflective posture** towards what happens around us. The principles, then, are:

Principle 1: ‘Quality of life’ for language teachers and learners.

Principle 2: Work to understand classroom language learning.

Principle 3: Work for mutual development.

Principle 4: Work to bring people together

Principle 5: Involve everybody – learners are co- researchers

Principle 6: Make the work as a continuous enterprise.

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

The first two principles emphasize the importance (i) of having all those involved in the teaching/learning process as practitioners, (ii) of establishing a safe and inclusive environment and (iii) of working for understanding what happens there. That is to say: teachers should see each learner as a unique individual who develops better in a social interactive environment and who is able to make decisions and be responsible for their own learning development. In this sense, **language teachers and learners in all their complexities are the central concern for Exploratory Practice.**

When referring to quality of life, Hanks (2017, p. 34) affirms that Exploratory Practice aims at making “life more liveable for all concerned”, seeking to establish this quality through “working together on questions that are relevant to them in their current situations and working to develop **mutual understandings** as well as their own **individual growth**”. This means we should integrate the classroom setting into research using language learning activities which could be used in a normal class, all of this to foster participation and **co-construction of knowledge.**

The next three principles highlight the importance of working together and of conducting this work in a spirit of mutual development through a **collegial way** (HANKS, 2017). It promotes a reflection about the distribution of roles and power and as a consequence it invites us, practitioners, to **be engaged in everything**

that permeates classroom life. In talking about roles and power, teachers are not to be considered as the authority of knowledge, the same way students are not passive learners as some traditional ideas combated by Exploratory practice.

Exploratory Practice, then, believes that classroom life has to do with social, cultural and individual aspects that go beyond the classroom, which makes us consider the understandings we construct as both collective and individual, as Allwright (2005, p. 360) states. In other words, the teaching/learning process should **be personal and at the same time collaborative and integrative**, having no hierarchy when it comes to learning and sharing ideas. By doing this, it leads us to conclude that Exploratory Practice promotes a more **human perspective towards learning** (PIE DADE, 2019, p. 23).

The sixth principle underlines the idea of Exploratory Practice as being a process, in the sense of continuity. The aim is to emphasize how dynamic a classroom environment is and how learning is an ongoing and everlasting process. Because of this, I would say that teachers and learners are the key of this learning journey, which, if taken as an opportunity to work in group, may promote positive impact in people's lives and as a consequence mutual growth and knowledge construction. This idea of continuity is fundamental because teachers and learners are constantly under construction, being them inside or outside classrooms outside. Therefore, Exploratory Practice seeks to develop a **continuous work for understanding** classroom practices.

Lastly, the seventh principle affirms that these understandings must be continuous and must be part of everyday classes as a way of minimizing the load on teachers and students' shoulders. The aim, instead of demanding from teachers any extra work, is to give them an opportunity to connect what already exists in the syllabus with classroom research. Working on this may maximize the **sustainability inside the classrooms**, facilitating the process of understanding.

In conclusion, Exploratory Practice focuses on **bringing awareness** to all the participants in the learning environment and on bringing sustainability during this process. It presents a set of principles to **empower teachers and learners** and make them conscious of what is going on in a collaborative way, which has to do with what we call Project-based Learning, subject of the next section.

2.2 PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Having come out through many movements of educational reform and having become popular through the thoughts of William Heard Kilpatrick (1918), inspired by Dewey's ideas, the Project Method was first designed and later on redefined as Project-based approach². This generated a new perspective of teaching young learners, which had as key point that learning should be meaningful and based on active exploration of real-world situations (KILPATRICK, 1918; DEWEY, 1981).

In talking about real world situations, Dewey (1934, p. 1), the father of PBL, believes that “experience occurs continuously, because the interactions are involved in the very process of living”. Very much aligned with him, I strongly believe that learning takes place in concrete and meaningful contexts where children may use all their senses in order to be actively involved during the learning process.

This notion of learning process I am talking about has to do with what Coufalová (2006, apud, KALABZOVÁ, 2015, p. 5) says: that we learn by doing, which is totally essential to PBL, once it should come together with student's interests and should involve them in real-world experiences, as Miller (2013) mentions, allowing them **to construct, create and actively inquire**³ their own daily pedagogical routines.

Such key terms were the forefront thoughts of Kilpatrick, whose mind implemented the idea of working through projects considering the child's interest. Moreover, as Kilpatrick pointed out, seen in Kalabzova (2015), projects, when built by all the participants, might make **students (and also teachers) involved in more meaningful contexts**, being it exactly what I try to do in my classroom, as will be seen later on in the analytical chapter.

Kilpatrick was not alone in designing PBL. Katz and Chard (1989) continued his work by seeing the project work as a complement to other aspects of the early childhood learning process. In other words, projects do not constitute the whole educational life of the kid. Instead, the authors think that teachers should use them as a tool **to act and reflect inside the classroom**.

² Also known as PBL as I will call it from now on.

³ For educational purposes and organization, the key concepts about PBL will be in bold to understand them better.

Katz and Chard (1992) defined project as an “extended investigation of a topic that is of **interest** [of the whole classroom]”. Their words, in connection with this monographic paper, lead me to think that it is extremely important to have the student's attention and engagement in any given pedagogic activity, which consequently means that the school environment goes beyond the classroom's walls. I see them (in reference to the classrooms' walls) as flexible learning spaces where teachers, as coparticipants, promote, together with learners, **world-and-life-related experiences and learning opportunities** (MILLER, 2013; PIEDADE, 2019).

Based on this, Chard (1991, p. 1-2) develops some beliefs of a project approach⁴. Even though they are not fixed ideas, they form a **social responsible look towards the classroom**, being some of them⁵, in my point of view, in alignment with the principles of Exploratory Practice, especially when Hanks (2009, p. 34) highlights the ideas of making the work as a “continuous enterprise” and of having all those “involved in classroom language learning” in the constitution of the school environment. In Chard's words:

- All children come to school with a quest to understand their experiences; all children want to learn;
- School is life and teachers and students should experience their time in school as real life rather than seeing these two as separate and unrelated spheres;
- Students construct their own knowledge but also need teachers to facilitate and guide this process;
- Students have diverse strengths, weaknesses, interests and backgrounds. Capitalizing on these differences enables students to learn from each other and to grow as individuals;
- Students learn best when they have a positive self-esteem and sense of purpose;
- Students learn through a mixture of first-hand observation hands-on experience and personal reflection;
- Teaching and learning are interactive processes;

⁴ It is worth mentioning that these beliefs have no intention of generalizing the multiple possibilities of being in the classroom; they are only possibilities of acting in that space/in this context.

⁵ I do not think that all the principles of Exploratory Practice and of Project Based Learning are aligned. What is aligned, on the other hand, is the pedagogic use I make of them. Along the following lines, I clarify the points of conflict as well as the points in common between these two approaches.

- Social and emotional skills are as important as academic skills and knowledge;
- Classrooms are flexible learning spaces that support and adapt student's needs;

Reflecting on the first sentence stimulates us to think about learning as something concrete, desired and accepted in many cases by learners. When it comes to young learners, I strongly believe that they are not an empty box waiting to be filled, neither a blank piece of paper to be written down. On the contrary, they are **social beings** who want to learn and share through interactions what they have already learned with others to make sense of the world around them.

In these terms, the second sentence tells us to **bring the world into the classroom** and provide the students with opportunities to freely explore their senses, by manipulating real objects, by seeing the results of their actions and by **building on/from past knowledge and experiences**.

Also, the third sentence sees the learners as active agents and emphasizes that projects are a **collaborative work** in which each one of the students has to be in charge of their own knowledge and curiosity path. Even though this PBL principle is related to the idea of teachers guiding and facilitating the educational process, I understand that the ones involved in these social practices should be seen as co-participants, co-producers, working under no hierarchies, considering the distribution of social roles within the classroom.

The fourth and the fifth sentences highlight how plural a classroom can be, regarding its cultural, political and ideological aspects. This indicates the necessity of seeing the students' and the teachers' peculiarities (from beliefs to weaknesses) as strong points in the constitution of a more **trustworthy pedagogical environment**, especially when it comes to learning with/from each other.

Moreover, the sixth and seventh sentences reinforce the idea that students can act autonomously by doing sensory based activities, by expressing themselves, by taking some risks and by learning from their mistakes. Considering this, I believe that children learn when they are **actively involved** and **motivated** in activities that are linked to their diverse realities.

In my point of view, in terms of language learning, the whole process is worthwhile because students have the chance to speak, discuss and exchange ideas making my role as a teacher the one of a **coparticipant**, once I have learned

(and still/will learn) a lot from them. I would say that children have a natural curiosity about their world and see life in its simplest details, such as smelling the rain, taking a deep breath, watching the birds, feeling the water running down their bodies and getting amazed about everything that surrounds them, as problematize in the analytical section, regarding picture 8. In talking about learning, I see my students as daily reminders of being **mindful and present**.

Besides that, I **learn from/through my students** when we are investigating about topics and, as a group, we build knowledge by sharing, studying and researching about vocabulary items I was not familiar with.

Finally, the last two sentences mention the importance of considering not only what we do, but also what we feel in the classroom. In other words, the subjectivity of the participants in relation to the emotions built inside and outside the classroom are to be taken into account in the way all the participants constitute the learning environment.

Besides, I would say that all the participants, including teachers and students, should prioritize the act of reflecting about everything that happens, that is to say: it has to do with establishing a zone of constant problematization of social practices built in the pedagogical context.

Therefore, I could observe that some points of PBL (like this one and the third principle) are not completely aligned with the Exploratory Practice proposal. As I already said, the theoretical-practical use I make of them are aligned, especially because I do not conceive Exploratory Practice and Project Based Learning in a positivist manner. It is quite the contrary: the way I, together with my students, construct our practices is to be understood as an invitation to understand and problematize our actions and feelings.

This careful look brings me to the idea of a **cooperative work** of all the participants in the learning process. According to Coufalová (2006 apud Kalabzová, 2015, p. 5) has an important role in it because she brings some other notions that complement that perception bringing other features about PBL. For her, PBL

(a) comes from the needs and interests of students; it enables them to fulfill their need to gain new experiences and be responsible for their work; (b) comes from a concrete and actual situation thus it is not re-

stricted by school premisses but even parents and others from student surrounding can be involved; (c) is interdisciplinary; (d) is above all an enterprise of a student; (e) the final product of PBL brings a concrete product and the process and result should be recorded [to be continuously investigated]; (f) is usually carried out in groups; (g) connects school with its neighborhood since it supports school integration into broader society and actual life.

To clarify these points, Katz and Chard (1992, p. 21) introduce some phases of a project that, not understood as a recipe, can help us learn more about the complex universe of working with such approach. According to them, a project has three phases: first phase (getting started), second phase (field work) and third phase (concluding a project).

In one of their actual projects, their objective (to construct a project about a river very near the school to connect the school to student's own lives) reinforces what Coufalova (2006, apud, Kalabzová, 2015, p. 4) presents in the quote above (mainly in point A) regarding the "needs and interests of the students" in the process of "gain[ing] new experiences."

In getting started with this project (in the initial phase), Katz and Chard (1992, p. 17) affirm that this is the moment when the teacher "encourages the children to share their own personal recollections related to the topic, and review knowledge of it". In these terms, teachers could suggest some activities such as drawing or painting their impression of the river and what happens there. Also, they could work with dramatization and block construction as a chance for the children to represent their experiences to each other.

Still about this initial moment, she also mentions reading and writing activities such as picnic in the park, other about feeding ducks, a boat ride, a fishing trip, and so forth. In doing that, she thinks students may raise awareness about the topic and consequently construct questions such as: "which way does the river flow?", "where does the water come from and go to?", "what wildlife can be found living on, in and near the river"?, "what kinds of plants grow in or near the water?" and so on. These questions raised by the participants of the learning process according to Chard can structure the opening activities in the second phase of the project.

The author sees the second phase as a field work, the moment to observe, take notes, to draw and make decisions about the constitution of the project. To perform this phase with her students, she presents construction activities (bridges and boats), scientific/environmental investigations (analyzing the water with filtering procedures, floating and sinking, experimenting with variations in the speed of flow at different depths and widths of channels, simulating flooding with a model landscape) and observation of small creatures in an aquarium or vivarium.

Finally, the author introduces the third phase as the conclusion of the project. This is the moment when students are invited to collect all they have learned so far and investigate their findings. For instance, photographs, drawings and paintings may be organized around the classroom in the sequence of telling the story of the river, from its source to its eventual destination in the ocean. After that, they are supposed to display and share their knowledge with the school community (teacher, friends and family).

The authors quoted above, in reference to Katz, Chard and Coufalová, are totally connected to what I do here in this paper considering the necessity of connecting school to student's own lives to get them engaged, in the sense of contributing and giving suggestions in the project work. In here we see the subjects on our daily basis without feeling/being pressured to memorize any formula. We (the authors, I and the students), on the other hand, experience what happens in the classroom, question ourselves about it and, in community, try to understand it.

The beliefs surrounding the notions of education and of learning language teaching, which here were presented through Exploratory Practice and Project Based Learning, cannot be distant from the context in which they are inserted. Because of this, below I present my school context and the methodological steps of this study.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I intend to report and describe the methodological procedures that guide this monographic study. First, I introduce my teaching context to better understand my research project. Then, I move on to the nature of my research, focusing on the epistemological perspective which I align myself with, the qualitative approach. Last, I include the data generation process and the analytical procedures.

3.1- MY TEACHING CONTEXT

The present exploratory research was developed with a group of very young students (2 to 3 years old) who had 30-minute morning classes every weekday at a private constructivist school in Rio de Janeiro, from the beginning of August to the middle of December in 2019. This educational institution is located in Leblon, one of the most expensive neighborhoods in this city.

This setting, surrounded by natural area, provides vegetation throughout the school ground as well as wildlife. Therefore, students are familiar with natural environment, sights, smells and textures which promote learning in favor of curiosity, autonomy, engagement and exploration.

For more than thirty years, the school used to receive children of one year of age up to the fifth grade, but this year the coordinators decided to focus only on the early education up to first grade. The school believes in an educational project within the principles of a humanistic philosophy in which the child is seen not only as a student, but also as a human being with individual needs and as the author of his/her own knowledge construction. Its pedagogical emphasis is on respecting childhood and also on recognizing child's features in order to promote the development of different skills.

In addition, the curricular content is presented in an interdisciplinary way, according to the age group, and it consists of specific pedagogical projects for each class. This way, all the projects are designed counting on the participation of the school community (teachers, parents, coordinators and staff) through constant conversations and through real-life situations to be examined and researched with the intention to connect the pedagogical environment to life itself.

Besides that, it is important to mention that the language immersion my students have access consists of activities that explore their daily experience, such as playing in the courtyard and having classes during snack time. In addition to this, it is worth saying that all the activities proposed are performed in a playful way, aiming to learn and understand better the world around.

For instance, during outdoor classes, students are invited to explore projects using all their senses like observing, collecting, sorting, scooping, tasting, touching, measuring, listening and counting. I usually plan activities that involve routine patterns of active participation through games related to the theme they are working with. Some of them are: hopscotch, statue game, tag, hide and seek, duck duck goose, silly walks, what's the time Mr. Wolf, The floor is lava and so on.

In talking about projects, it is important to highlight that we (teachers, students, coordinators and school community) choose the project theme as group work through constant observations, mutual exchange, very attentive listening to parents and attentive eyes to students' needs and interests.

After choosing the project theme, students usually work on it for one month in their mother tongue and then for one more month in English, including their parents' participation along the year. These projects must follow the same topics of the project in Portuguese and every bimester the topic changes, even though it can be extended in case students perform with interest and involvement throughout the project.

Linking to that, working with children in a foreign space like mine, the language production starts little by little through play-like activities and retelling a story. We also play guessing games in which children have to ask yes/no questions to find out what is in my bag. On the other hand, older students need examples of the expressions used to share ideas interrupt and give opinions about the topic. Keeping this in mind, it is important to provide them with the clear and meaningful language exposure, for example, letting them make their own flashcards and memory games based on their learned content.

The second phase is when we make a poster to make them grasp in English what they are working with. This is the moment when I, together with a group of preschool kids, explore more information about the theme using realia and drawings. For instance, we had a project called "Birds" with my 5-year-old students and we got to know the concept through showing pictures of insects, plants, rep-

tiles, mammals by eliciting questions “Is this a bird?”, “Do all birds fly?” “Do all birds have beaks?” and then, as a group work, we made a poster containing birds only such as penguins, parrot, chickens, ostriches, etc.

Moreover, we made bird watching binoculars⁶, and then went outside to observe the birds around the school in order to analyze their features, quantities, habitat and sizes. They also did an observation drawing.

Next, we saw a few pictures of birds and how each bird moves/flies and what noise it makes. We watched a movie on YouTube related to birds’ life⁷ and we also got encouraged to join in acting out the different birds and saying their names. Together, we discovered what these animals have in common: they are birds. We reviewed their characteristics (feathers, wings, lay eggs, etc.).

Besides, I read many stories related to the theme such as (the ugly duckling), (the little red hen), and (five little ducks) and so on. We sang (Three Little Birds by Bob Marley) and played games called (duck, duck, and goose) during outdoor classes.

Then, we walked around the school to pick up some branches. Using the branches, children made a bird nest. Furthermore, students added bird on the bird nest by making a drawing of different colors and feather.

Lastly, I selected a picture of some birds and took it to class. Children colored the picture. Then they cut out the picture to make puzzle pieces. They pasted their puzzle pieces together. We prepared popcorn and corn on the cob.

The aim of the project was to bring children closer to the birds that are in the school, city and nature in order to allow them to know, recognize and respect these animals. The relationship with the world of birds led them to observe the urban daily life in a new perspective through listening to the song of the thrush, watching the flight of the birds and looking for a nest hidden in the trees.

In analyzing this project in specific and my daily professional routine as a whole, I usually face some challenges. Some of them are: being the only person who can speak English in my school context and consequently being responsible for the whole interaction in a second language sometimes is not always good. Not

⁶ An example of this activity <https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/toilet-paper-roll-binoculars-4164742>

⁷ Watch the movie “Rio 2” on the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkmb3E7vgZ0>

that we would not appreciate Portuguese in our classes, but I think students need more immersion in English.

Second, students feel enthusiastic about English classes and I am always welcome into their classrooms. However, I have observed that it would be even better if there was a space where English classes take place in order to have an English-speaking reference.

Last, the school values creativity and authenticity in activities and most of them are made by students such as toys, objects and games. Considering that, I think the institution does not provide us with enough technological resources and, sometimes, it is challenging for me. I believe that it would be good to have some digital resources in a variety of ways to support teaching and learning.

On the other hand, in being part of a pedagogic team that constantly search for knowledge construction, I see myself inserted in a friendly atmosphere where the school community is encouraged to think, to listen, to understand and to improve our critical look about what is going on around us. Second, when it comes to a friendly atmosphere, it also has to do with the passion for learning and exchanging with children. In talking about that, the school values the autonomy of each child, promoting a welcoming environment so that they feel safe in taking some risks and making mistakes. Last, I also have the autonomy as a teacher to observe, to listen, to understand and to negotiate through cooperation with others (students and staff).

After this brief presentation of the context I am inserted, we should now understand the methodological approach I adopt in this research, the qualitative one.

3.2 THE QUALITATIVE METHOD AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Having this topic in mind to explore, I need to consider how I want to conduct this investigation. First, it is important to say I intend to construct a study about my own teaching practice. Given this social context, I decided to guide this research within the qualitative method, especially because its ethical and responsible view towards research is aligned with the principles of Exploratory Practice and of Project Based Learning (areas I base myself to lead my practices as teacher and as researcher).

Regarding the qualitative method itself, Denzin and Lincoln (2006, p.17) see it as an investigative tool that gives a careful look towards any social context, seeking to understand the linguistic constructions about it, which means that the role of qualitative approach, according to Richard (2013, p. 10), relies on

- Studying human actors in natural settings, in the context of their ordinary, everyday world;
- Understanding the meanings and significance of these actions from the perspective of those involved;
- Focusing on a small number of individuals, groups or settings.

The first principle has to do with the need to study various cultures and settings in context, and not as generalized and idealized concepts. That is, through experiencing and reflecting about the everyday world, we should observe it and analyze it critically, with a posture of immersion.

In talking about being critical, the second principle sees the qualitative approach as an interactive process, which points out to the relevance of being attentive and curious about any social phenomena, leading us to develop understandings and interpretations concerning social life.

When it comes to this process of understanding, the last principle is related to the idea that researchers should focus on the knowledge construction process and not in the measurement or in casual explanation of the investigated topic. Since we deal, in researches of this kind, with real life (constructed here and now), usually, numbers and statistics are not as relevant as the linguistic constructions and interpretations about our own experiences.

Still about qualitative research, I consider myself as a social actor who, together with my students, seeks to actively construct knowledge through action and critical reflection. Having this in mind, I agree with Moita Lopes (2006), when he thinks that carrying out a research is a matter of taking a position and involving all the participants in order to generate understandings as a team.

The aspects mentioned above have to do with my research because I intend to understand better what happens in my classroom (qualitatively speaking), taking into account “My backyard is greater than the world” (better explained and

analyzed in chapter 4), in articulation with the philosophy of Exploratory Practice and of Project Based Learning.

In alignment with Exploratory Practice and Project Based Learning, I believe that interaction is the key to teaching and learning language, so I registered this project through photos (taken by me and by interns) with a focus on students interacting with each other, with the project and with me as well. In doing that, for ethical reasons, students' faces will not be exposed.

Besides, my data analysis will be in a temporal sequence: I will (i) present 10 pictures (photo by photo), (ii) explain the context in which each one was taken and (iii) analyze them (one by one), in order to better understand its micro context, through discussions and articulations based on the ideas proposed by Exploratory Practice and PBL (as mentioned above).

Finally, after these explanations concerning my methodological choices for the construction of this research, such as the research paradigm adopted, the context of this study and the process of data generation, I believe we are sufficiently informed to start the analytical part of this monographic paper.

4 MY BACKYARD IS GREATER THAN THE WORLD - DATA ANALYSIS

As mentioned before, this research is focused on a group of very young students (2 to 3 years old) who are seen as co-researchers of their (pedagogic) world and its complexity. Being aware of that, the project I am going to analyze as data is inspired by Manoel de Barros' poem "O apanhador de desperdícios" which is related to the idea of a connection between nature and childhood, especially when he mentions:

"I respect unimportant things and unimportant beings, I appreciate more bugs than planes. I appreciate more the turtle's speed than the missile's, I hold within me this birth delay, I was equipped to like birds, I have plenty to be happy about. My backyard is greater than the world."
(BARROS, 2008, p. 149)⁸

When I started preparing these English language classes, I had in mind that this project could provide students and I with valuable information and insights about how to make learning meaningful and enjoyable. Thus, I decided to promote engaging activities with the intention to bring real possibilities of research and learning as self-critical analysis.

This is when I felt the necessity to understand what goes on in my language classroom in order to be mindful and curious about my practice, the same way my students are during their tasks. These collections of thoughts generated what I called "My backyard is greater than the world", which in the next lines will be better presented and analyzed through an exploratory and project-based look.

⁸ "Dou respeito às coisas desimportantes
e aos seres desimportantes.
Prezo insetos mais que aviões.
Prezo a velocidade
das tartarugas mais que a dos mísseis.
Tenho em mim um atraso de nascença.
Eu fui aparelhado
para gostar de passarinhos.
Tenho abundância de ser feliz por isso.
Meu quintal é maior do que o mundo".
(BARROS, 2008, p.149)

Picture 1 - Outdoor exploration



Source: picture taken in 2019.

First, in this outdoor exploration, I, together with preschool children, got to know the concept of “backyard” and “nature”, by bringing them some of it into the classroom. Also, we explored nature on their way home through observing fallen leaves, fallen flowers, seeds, pinecones, sticks, stones, tree bark and so on. The purpose was to notice nature and identify, collect and orally show to their classmates various natural items.

As we can observe in the first picture, preschoolers are on a nature hunt and each one of them is holding a box and picking up some leaves on the ground. If you look further, we can see that even the ground, the gate and the box are green, which lead us to think about nature and its elements. It is also important to mention that children, both in group and individually, were the ones who chose the color of their boxes to represent what they know about nature, that is to say, it comes from the kids’ point of view/how they see nature and not from a stereotyped look.

In talking about working together, it calls our attention to Exploratory Practice principles (ALLWRIGHT, 2003) which see learners as active agents capable of learning in their own singular way and see the learning environment as

plural and multifaceted. It leads us to the idea that a classroom is not meant to be about four walls in a closed area. It is, in my point of view, the real world outside being constructed by students in experiences related to seeing, touching and smelling nature.

Moreover, at the same time learners are seen as social beings who develop better in an interactive environment (ALLWRIGHT, D; MILLER, 2012) learning itself needs to come alive through concrete experiences that provide ongoing construction and reconstruction of knowledge not only individually but also among students and teachers. For instance, when the kids found a green leaf, the word “green” is already known by them, but “leaf” is a new vocabulary for them. Thus, they learn through making connections to their previous knowledge and through adding them to the growing knowledge base.

In connecting these thoughts to PBL, what we do, pedagogically speaking, must be linked to everyday life (CHARD, 1991, p. 2). What I mean is: the act of going outdoors offers a closer relationship with colors, textures, sounds and smells we do not notice on our daily routine. Doing that, we are able to unite the pedagogic moment in its broaden sense with students’ own lives to get them engaged in more meaningful contexts, such as the construction of a group poster as will be seen in the next photo.

Picture 2 - Nature collage poster



Source: picture taken in 2019.

On the following class, we observed the items previously found on the school ground and reported what we thought about them in reference to size, colors, quantity and shapes. We raised some questions related to the previous class, for instance: “what is this?”, “Is this a leaf or a stick?” and “what color is it?”. Through observing and questioning ourselves, we counted, sorted, touched, sang songs connected to theme and glued these items on a cardboard paper.

As we can see in the picture, the children’s hands are touching the floor which, in my point of view, is the same as to say they are constructing knowledge through textures and colors. In alignment with EP (MILLER, 2013) and PBL (KATZ; CHARD, 1992) the activities here are palpable, concrete and real, the same way the learning environment has to be.

By learning environment, I would like to highlight that the whiteboard, in its traditional use, is not the focus in a PBL English classroom. On the contrary, students are central and their movements should explore everything around them, from the floor to the leaves on their hands, as seen above.

For that reason, I distance myself from traditional pedagogical ideas based on having the teacher as the center of any educational process or as responsible for transferring knowledge to the students. I do not see them as passive subjects or as empty boxes waiting to be filled (CHARD, 1991, p.2). On the other hand, based on PBL’s principles, I strongly believe that, instead of just being told about any pedagogical content (as mentioned in the picture 1), students are to be taken as active learners who learn by actually doing and experiencing in real-life situations, which leads us to picture 3, when the students and I, together, make a sticky wall.

Picture 3 – Sticky wall

Source: picture taken in 2019.

This picture is the result of a previous activity worth mentioning. The poster itself is the final production of an activity I call nature scavenger hunt. For this activity, I wrote a list of nature-related material they could find in the school backyard and together, as a group work, we went on a nature scavenger hunt. We gathered objects in different colors, for instance, “can you find green leaves?”, “can you find red flowers?”, “can you find brown sticks?” and “can you find big/small leaves?”. The language production started little by little through repetition, gestures and language exposure.

Thus, we were able to construct a large collection of leaves, seeds, flowers, sticks and stones, which, together, generated the poster above. In doing this, we managed to incorporate nature into our daily activities. We also could experience learning as something concrete and possible to revisit each day through observing, smelling, touching and exchanging knowledge with the members of the group. Through revisiting knowledge, kids saw which nature elements stuck and which did not stick. Besides that, they discovered that leaves and flowers changed color as time went by.

By reading the sixth principle in EP, I could understand that learning is a process of “involvement, union, mutual development as well as continuity” (ALLWRIGHT, D; MILLER, 2012, p. 109). In other words, education is an ongo-

ing and everlasting process and this means we are constantly under construction and development inside and outside the classroom.

In talking about process, I see in this picture that the learning process is not a package of knowledge to be memorized or quantified. Therefore, as PBL (KATZ; CHARD, 1992) preaches, students learn by manipulating real objects, by seeing the results of their actions and by building on/from past knowledge and experiences related to real life, as will be seen in the next photo.

Picture 4 - Exploring nature through light table



Source: picture taken in 2019.

In this class, as a group work, we got curious, motivated and imaginative by using the light. Thus, we placed some natural items on the light table to observe with them the structure and shape of the leaves and flowers.

Acting as protagonists of their own learning, central concept present in EP (ALLWRIGHT, 2003) and in PBL (CHARD, 1991), they got amazed and engaged in every discovery and involved in exploring the stones and the leaves more thoroughly, seeing the veins, midrib, colors and every inch of the leaf, as seen in the picture above.

In talking about autonomy, I see my kids as active learners who take charge of their own learning process. I also see hands touching nature elements on the light table as a way to connect previous knowledge to new discoveries. To my mind, kids here are being researchers, which points out to a “more humanly active [posture, making them] stronger agents [...]” (ALLWRIGHT; MILLER, 2012, p. 106) in their learning process.

I must highlight that in terms of language, I could observe my pupils with more desire to learn and speak a foreign language. They were really immersed into a natural use of language, expressions, structures and words related to the project theme. In my point of view, the act of implementing projects is a way of independence, responsibility and opportunity to practice social skills and to broaden vocabulary.

To reach this aim, the teacher plays an important role in the learning process, by being “available to the children for consultation at all times” (KATZ; CHARD, 1992, p. 8) and by being open to “[listen], guide, facilitate [and also to co-construct knowledge]” (CHARD, 1991, p. 1). This leads us to picture 5, when the students and I, participated in a sink or float experiment.

Picture 5 - Sink or float experiment



Source: picture taken in 2019.

Next, we selected some materials from nature to place them one at a time in the water and observe whether each item sinks or floats. It must be noted that these nature elements were brought from students/parents, who contributed to the project Nature, helping children investigate aspects of the topic on a weekend.

Having this in mind, extending learning to children's own every day is a good start to get them motivated with the project, as you can see in the picture above. Observing carefully, I see kids being curious about what was happening in the class such as colors, quantity and science experiment. So, I raised some questions "Do the seeds sink or float?", "Does the shell sink or float?" and "Does the leaf sink or float?" and they would try to make some predictions.

In this exercise of making predictions, it is possible to see that students and I worked together as a team in order to reach understandings and participated actively in the activity above. Relating what I observe in this picture to EP, I would say that the act of participating means sharing and negotiating power among teachers and students to make them the main actors of the learning process where they will be encouraged to learn how to think critically (MILLER, 2013).

Besides, looking further at the picture, we can see the learning environment as a living and participatory space where kids can think, create, act, guess, reflect and make sense of the world. Apparently, in the picture, students have an attentive look to what is happening at the moment and have "involvement in learning" (KATZ; CHARD, 1992, p. 25), which I consider fundamental to enhance linguistic capacities and motivation towards studying a language. This leads us to picture 6, when students and I did some paintings with nature paintbrushes.

Picture 6 - Painting with nature's paintbrushes



Source: picture taken in 2019.

In the following classes, we went on a walk around the school to see what interesting natural objects we could find. The kids collected and put them into their boxes (the ones mentioned in picture one). When we headed back to classroom, I told them to look for different textures and patterns on them and I explained that they would work with the format of the leaves by painting them.

Before painting, I showed them that it is possible to make nature paintbrushes intending to do a group painting based on the leaves' colors such as green, red, yellow, orange and brown. We also sang "Why do leaves change colors?" song⁹ and I also asked them "Do the leaves look the same or different?" to explore a different type of plant leaf in order to create different patterns and textures on the paper.

As observed in the picture above, we brought the outdoors in, by making use of sticks, twigs and leaves to construct the brushes. There are six nature paintbrushes with different characteristics, shapes, textures and colors to do a free group painting. To reach this aim, kids touched and chose their brushes in order to see what marks they could make onto the paper and also mixing colored paint with no restrictions or expectations by me.

By bringing nature into the classroom, I would say that students and I made learning come alive promoting creativity and imagination through painting and mixing colors. From this perspective, I noticed some connections with EP (HANKS, 2017) and PBL thoughts (CHARD, 1991) such as encouraging learners

⁹ This song can be found on the following link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sa_zH0RXfvk

to be free, creative and imaginative as way to engender positive feelings and emotion towards learning, as will be seen in the next photo.

Picture 7 - Making art with leaves



Source: picture taken in 2019.

Having in mind that my young preschoolers love activities that involve language and arts, I promoted another art activity collaboratively, but now intending to look for the veins and textures through printing leaves. First, we started choosing leaves from the nature box, and then I said that they could mix the colors together to create new shades. After that, I told them to place the leaves facing them down in order to remove and reveal leaves print on a large paper.

Observing this picture above, I see leaves in different colors, shapes and sizes on the floor. In addition, learners are touching, holding, painting and printing leaves with their own hands. Through this hands-on painting, students could experience cause and effect while mixing colors and textures, as well as printing leaves.

In other words, they were encouraged to experience the paint with their hands, to observe the marks the paint makes, to look at the leaves closely, to take on new perspectives and to interact with themselves and their peers.

In experiencing painting, I could also see that working through projects “involve or allow the integration of a range of subjects/disciplines” (KATZ; CHARD, 1992, p. 15) such as this art activity above. That means learning comes

from different perspectives in order to expose learners to a wider range of vocabulary and to lead greater creativity.

Moreover, it also worths mentioning that hands-on activities are a tool to get learners “active and thoughtful participants in their own learning” (ALL-WRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p. 19), promoting involvement, self-confidence, pleasure and enthusiasm – key terms to “engender positive feelings” (CHARD, 1991, p. 1) in the language classroom – as will be analyzed in the next picture, when my students and I observed and listened to rain falling outside.

Picture 8 – Observing and listening to rain



Source: picture taken in 2019.

In this picture above, I read a story “We’re going on a leaf hunt”¹⁰ as a way to get kids to know sounds words and language. We also made some rhymes and some singing while telling a story because I believe it is fundamental to get the most of their attention span.

After telling the story, we played musical chairs in order to review nature vocabulary, but we heard some noises from the sky and that noise was a thunder. That noise coming from outside got the young learners very curious and scared.

¹⁰ This story can be found on the following link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5p-fuvUYBM>

So, I took this moment as a learning opportunity, inviting them to look outside and see/listen to the rain falling heavily from the sky.

As we can observe above, I see a classroom as an open window to get to know the world. Through the window, everyone is invited to see the sky, the trees, the plants, the animals and the rain. In doing that, I noticed how effective a critical use of the learning environment is because it provides many possibilities to learn and explore through the children's eyes.

In talking about children's eyes, they are observing carefully to every detail outside and I know that each one of them has different perspectives of the world. That means my pupils are "unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own idiosyncratic way" (ALLWRIGHT, 2009, p. 4) and I also believe that everyone has a way of acquiring, understanding and reflecting upon what is being experienced.

Besides, in taking learning as opportunity I would say that it is essential to explore what puzzles or amazes learners in order to provide independence and empowerment of their own learning. As a result, students would show more interest, concentration and attention on linguistic forms and vocabulary.

Therefore, that goes along with PBL (KATZ; CHARD, 1992) in the sense that working through projects should be based on the learners' previous experiences and potential interest to raise contributions, participations and suggestions from their own observation, as will be seen in picture 9.

Picture 9- Leaf, Leaf, Flower!



Source: picture taken in 2019.

As mentioned previously in my school context section, at least once a week I plan outdoor activities that demand active participation such as “Duck, duck, goose” illustrated above. Students already know this game, but the challenge is to work on the new vocabulary and on structures through communicating spontaneously in natural settings.

The purpose in playing this game is to promote repeated opportunities to hear and use useful sentences. Also, students would associate and incorporate extra words and sentences related to the project theme such as adapting the rhyme to “leaf, leaf, flower”. In this way, this activity may help children to refine their existing knowledge and construct new ones, as mentioned in pictures 1, 2 and 3.

In observing the picture above, I see my classroom as a multifaceted, heterogeneous and plural environment where children act and think in different ways. As we can see, kids are taking different roles such as chasing, running, tapping each player on the head, saying ‘leaf’ and taking turns being “It”.

Moreover, I would say that being a student has to do with a variety of shades in the learning process and it goes along with EP (MILLER, 2013) and PBL (CHARD, 1991) thoughts when these two perspectives consider students social actors who hold different perspectives, and also want to learn and share many ways of being in classroom to promote together understandings and mutual growth as a team, as will be seen in the last picture.

Picture 10- What is it that lives up in the garden and down in the dirt



Source: picture taken in 2019.

The last picture illustrates an outdoor activity with my very young learners and the purpose was to explore another element of nature, “the soil”. First, they manipulated it and reframed nature into castles, houses, cakes and so on. Through discovering their surroundings, I saw children deeply concentrated on what they were doing and also on experiencing the textures of soil and dirt. I would say that they are scientists who have an attentive and curious look to themselves and the world.

In talking about being attentive, we can see that there are two hands touching, scooping and playing on the ground. That means students are, in many occasions, open to get to know the new and its characteristics, which may be seen as a way to foster learning through touching, feeling, comparing and observing.

To reach this aim, I would say that young learners should have contact with any piece of knowledge in concrete and real situations (MILLER, 2013; KALABZOVÁ, 2015) through daily hands-on actions and discoveries. Because of that, I see learners as the center of learning and as mindful beings who must have their needs and interests contemplated.

In sharing interesting experiences, such as the ones mentioned in this chapter, I would say students and I could learn how to negotiate meaning and to work together in order to grow and develop mutually as individuals and as a group. Consequently, we could build self-confidence and self-esteem in the language learning process.

In this very same process of critical observation from the perspectives of EP (HANKS, 2017) and of PBL (KALABZOVÁ, 2015), even though I consider this investigative journey an everlasting one, on the next chapter I will present my final considerations considering this research as a whole and my understandings regarding my professional context.

5 DISCUSSION AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding research as life (MILLER, 2013), I could not finish this paper without mentioning some of the perceptions I collectively constructed in this investigative journey. I would like to highlight: (i) the acting of being a teacher as a group work (instead of a solitary process); (ii) the idea that research is way more than its final product (a monographic paper, a dissertation or a thesis); (iii) my students' and my colleagues' contribution in this investigative process; (iv) some reflections the analysis of the pictures generated in what I understand by learning/teaching English.

First, I would like to reflect on the process of constructing this study in partnership, from the choice of the theme, through the generation, selection, transcription and analysis of the data to the final considerations (as I do at this moment). It was a constant eye-and-mind-opening process of integrating learners, teachers and school community to work together in order to teach, build critical thinking and make reflections at the same time.

That goes along with Exploratory Practice (ALLWRIGHT, 2001) and with PBL (CHARD, 1991), when they point out that research, teaching and learning should be inclusive and collegial. This principle taught me to develop group work in a collaborative way and, consequently, I was able to flourish as an educator and as a person who is learning to live under a continuous attitude of looking and listening (attentive and critically).

Second, it is important to say that research is not a product. I see it as an ongoing activity that permeates classroom life. For instance, the project named "My backyard is greater than world" was so meaningful and productive to my students that it had an extension and consequently was dismembered in another project of interest to them¹¹

That means that research has to do with our lives and it is an everlasting process in which we are constantly under construction and development in trying to understand what happens in and out of school. Thus, I strongly believe that it is very important to keep being curious about our practices and about our beliefs, paying close attention to whatever may emerge in our language classrooms.

¹¹ Due to time and space constraints, the whole journey of this project and its possible developments will not be mentioned in this monographic paper. In spite of that, as an exploratory and project-based researcher, I intend to continue researching and investigating this context.

Third, I could not leave out my working partners with whom I have established a relationship based on trust, hope, encouragement and care. These people are not only in the classroom, but also in the kitchen, reception, school office, which means they all are integrated and affected by living with these children.

In talking about my students, I could not finish this research without talking about them, who are my everyday learning and inspiration. Otherwise speaking, my kids have taught me so many valuable life lessons such as being autonomous, spontaneous, curious, imaginative, free and passionate for life.

Fourth, the analysis of those pictures was rich enough to the extent of generating many reflections and even more questions. I could note that it is fundamental to question and reflect about our choices and about our own practices to try to understand them. In observing my students, I noticed how they are rich in potential, strong, competent and, most of all, willing to interact with each other. That means they are, above all, social beings who have their own voices and attentive ears that listen to life in its forms and colors, as seen in all pictures above.

In talking about life, I could also understand that learning English can be the same as dealing with life itself. This way, students had the chance to (re)construct, (re)invent and (re)formulate knowledge by playing the roles of students and researchers (as seen in pictures 1-2-3-5). They could, in other words, experience a pedagogic context surrounded by real interaction, collaboration, integration and emotional bond (as seen in pictures 6, 7, 8 and 9) – which is exactly what EP and PBL promote.

Finally, I would say that I have learned a lot throughout this challenging and rewarding journey. These moments mentioned above – in general – helped me see the world (of teaching) through even more sensitive lenses. Therefore, this research is just the beginning of what may become a topic for future academic and non-academic investigation(s).

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