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PRACTICES AND THEIR CHALLENGES IN AN ENGLISH TEACHING PROJECT OF A BRAZILIAN STATE UNIVERSITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The **aim** of this manuscript is to present, analyze and discuss the practices developed in a Teacher Education project called *Residência Pedagógica* (Pedagogical Residency) - a project that the Brazilian government offers to Brazilian universities - and their challenges during the pandemic. More specifically, it intends to focus on the practical phase of the first module of the project, which was when the project-participants observed classes in the school, designed lesson plans for the groups of whose classes they observed and implemented the lessons for these groups.

Methodology. Qualitative research method was adopted in this study. The reports, lesson plans and video lessons of the project's participants were used as data in order to analyze their practices under the light of theoretical discussion held during the project. A reflexive diary kept by me was also used as data. Moreover, the participants' practices were contrasted with situations that occurred in the pandemic context.

Results. The project practical phases did not occur as foreseen; however, the participants were able to reflect upon their practices based on the theoretical discussion carried out previously in the project. They recognized the language learning and teaching perspectives in the lessons they observed and, in the lesson, plans they designed and implemented. The pandemic had a great interference in the project, which had to be adapted, so that the first module could be concluded.

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Conclusions. *In spite of the pandemic, we managed to reach the project's main objective, which was to provide space for college students, who shall graduate as English teachers, to have contact with the school environment.*

KEYWORDS: *Brazilian Context, COVID-19, English Teaching Project, State Schools, Teaching Education.*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has created, in the entire world, a scenario of social distancing that forced people to get adapted to many daily activities. In the educational context, the situation would not be different. In Brazil, we have faced many challenges in our classrooms during this context (Barros & Viera, 2021; Linhares et al., 2020). Students have struggled with the online lessons, due to lack of internet and technological access and also due to digital literacy (Souza et al., 2020).

Teachers have faced difficulties in dealing with remote lessons (Paludo, 2020). The government in an attempt to solve the situation has taken emergency measures, providing little support to teachers and students, disconsidering the economical issues many Brazilians face in their homes (Praun, 2020).

Even though Brazil has an Education Ministry that orients our educational contexts, every Brazilian state has an Educational Secretary that takes into consideration its own specificities. In the state of Paraná, in the southern region of Brazil, state schools have adopted Google Workspace for their educators to teach their synchronous and asynchronous lessons.

The government also provided schools with video lessons (*aulas Paraná*) to assist teachers in their practices. State universities have adopted the virtual resources they already had available such as Moodle and Google services. However, unlike schools, each university in Paraná, within their departments, has decided

their pedagogical strategies, considering the courses' and projects' specificities.

In the Language Department of UNICENTRO in the city of Irati, the specificities have mainly revolved around the theoretical and the practical courses and projects. Most practical courses and projects have an interface with state schools, where students engage in their Teacher Education practices.

Considering such specificities, this paper **aims** at presenting, analyzing and discussing the practices developed in a Teacher Education project called *Residência Pedagógica* (Farias & Diniz-Pereira, 2019) and their challenges during the pandemic. More specifically, the paper focuses on the practical phase of the first module of the project, which is when the students observed classes in the school, designed lesson plans for the groups of whose classes they observed, and implemented the lessons to these groups.

The project was composed of three modules, which shares the same phases: 1) discussion of theoretical topics on teaching and learning, 2) observing and assisting teachers in their classes, and 3) designing lesson plans and applying them in the observed classes. The differences among the phrases lay on their levels of difficulty, which increases from one phrase to another.

This paper is organized as follows. Firstly, I introduce a theoretical discussion on the language teaching and learning perspective that guided the first phrase of the project. This phrase aimed at providing a basis for the project-

participants to analyze the lessons they observed and to design the lesson plans. Secondly, I present the method adopted in this study in order to reach its objectives. Thirdly, I share the results, analyze and discuss them. Finally, I conclude the manuscript.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Within Linguistics, the concept of language is multifaceted, so theorists investigate parts of it in a linear way. B. Kumaravadivelu manages to gather language theories and group them in “three broad conceptual vantage points: language as system, language as discourse, and language as ideology” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 4).

His conceptual organization is highly practical, especially for those who need a panoramic understanding of language. Succinctly, language as system conveys structural perspective on language, such as the formal disciplines of Linguistics, such as phonetics, morphology, syntax, and semantics, that is, formal and structural aspects of language. Language as discourse manages theories that bring into consideration the context in which language is inserted and occurs.

Communication is a key within this conceptual point, and the notions of interlocutor, language use, language functions, communicative competence, speech acts, etc come to light. Finally, language as ideology deals with critical and ideological aspects of language. Within this perspective, concepts such as power relation, and critical discourse analysis play an important role.

As for a second language (L2), additional concepts are necessary to be discussed. Understanding language as system, discourse and ideology is not enough, we need to consider how we develop all these grammatical, contextual and critical aspects of language in a new

language, an L2. Several models to understand and explain L2 competence have been around: Hymes’ model (1972), Canale and Swain’s model (1980), Canale (1983), Bachman’s model (1990), Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell’s model (1995), Littlewood’s model (2011). Although much discussion has been held on this topic, we still do not have a strong consensus about the nature of L2 competence.

Canale and Swain (1980), for instance, consider communicative competence as the integration of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences. The other models consider similar competences, but they adopt different dynamics and explore these competences in different ways. The major issue of these models, in my opinion, is that they do not account for the ideological part of language, like interculturality, which asserts that in order for communication to be effective, the learner needs to know about the other culture and also about their own, since language and culture cannot be disassociated (Kramsch & Hua, 2016).

Since the term and the concept of competence is problematic, Kumaravadivelu (2008) suggests the use of the terms knowledge and ability instead. In a few words, “language knowledge is what is in the mind of the language users, and when they use it appropriately to achieve their communicative purpose in a given context, they exhibit their language ability” (p. 21).

For the author, both terms cannot be used separately when talking about knowing an L2, as he states “knowing an L2 may be considered as having linguistic knowledge/ability and pragmatic knowledge/ability required to use the language with grammatical accuracy and

communicative appropriacy (p. 25)". In other words, in order to properly learn an L2, we must learn about it and how to use it. I would add that we also need to have a critical stance towards an L2, so that our learning process can be completed.

Moving on to the learning and teaching fields, the first concept that should be considered is the role of input, which is pivotal in learning and teaching a language. Kumaravadivelu (2008) explains that for input to be part of the learning process, it should be available and accessible for learners. That is, all the input available for learners, being it interlanguage, simplified or non-simplified, should be attainable to them. In the teaching field, input modification grounds methods and approaches. We can group the approaches in three perspectives: Focus on FormS, Focus on Meaning, and Focus on Form.

In terms of research and methodological application, these perspectives follow a chronological and historical order. Focus on Form understands that linguistic structures, or form, is the main source of input in the classroom. Focus on Meaning, on the other hand, ignores forms, having as input, in the classroom, the pragmatic use of language exclusively. Finally, Focus on Form advocates that forms are necessary, but only they derive from a context of pragmatic use of language, being it from the teacher or the learner.

It is worth pointing out that, regardless of the approach, one of the objectives of L2 teaching, perhaps the main one, is to lead learners to learn the language that is being taught, and by learning, we mean the linguistic/pragmatic development that allows learners to use the language for communication purposes. According to Kumaravadivelu (2008), "teaching, it is the task of the teacher to help learners

reach a desired level of linguistic and pragmatic knowledge/ability that addresses their needs, wants, and situations" (p. 25).

Scientifically speaking, Focus on Form seems to be the perspective that assists the most learning with their learning development. Ellis (1999) explains that Focus on FormS, for instance, tends to promote only linguistic knowledge, missing the ability development. On the contrary, focusing only on the use of language, excluding the focus on form totally, seems to auxiliate in the ability development; however, it may cause lead learners to commit errors.

Swan (2005) points out that learners that participated in immersion programs in Canadá, with a Focus on Meaning approach presented difficulties in syntactic and morphological issues, besides not being able to grasp sociolinguistic topics.

We understand, by what was exposed so far, that a teaching methodology concerned with language learning should have as basis the use of language, which approaches form when necessary.

In sum, during the first phase of the project, the students and I discussed the concepts of language, learning and teaching, which were briefly presented in this section. The understandings that we came to were that: *(i) language should be approached, in the classroom, from its different perspectives, allowing learners to have availability and access to every language interface, in a balanced way, and (ii) Focus on Form is the teaching perspective that presents more scientific evidence of its success.*

In the next section, I present the method followed in this study.

METHODOLOGY

The Pedagogical Residency project is offered by the federal government to all Brazilian universities that have degrees with a teaching diploma in different areas such as Geography, History, Pedagogy, Languages, among others. The project is one of the actions that integrate the National Teacher Education Policy and aims to induce the improvement of practical training in undergraduate courses, promoting the immersion of students in the basic education school, from the second half of their major.

This immersion should include, among other activities, classroom management and pedagogical intervention, accompanied by a school teacher with experience in the undergraduates' teaching area and guided by a professor from their Institution (Farias & Diniz-Pereira, 2019).

The project's participants were (1) me, the coordinator, professor in the Language Department of UNICENTRO, Irati-PR, dedicated to English Language Learning and Teaching and Teacher Education, (2) a school English language teacher, who was selected through a selective process, and was responsible for assisting the students in the school environment, and six students of English from the 3rd and 4th undergraduate years, who were also selected through a selective process. It is worth mentioning that the 3rd and 4th years are the last two ones before graduation and students that take this major are prepared to become English teachers.

That is why a project such as Pedagogical Residency is part of their opportunities to gain more teaching experience.

The project is composed of three modules of 138 hours each. In this paper, I explore the first module, which started at the beginning of October/2020 and came to

an end at the end of March/2021. From these 138 hours, 40 hours were directed to theoretical discussion, 26 hours of class observation, 12 hours of lesson plans preparation, 40 hours of class teaching, and 20 hours of final report writing. It is worth mentioning that due to the pandemic, the schools and the Education Secretary were getting adapted to remote teaching and the bureaucratic process to accept college students to access the virtual classrooms, so our access to the students and classes got delayed.

Having explained the context, we now turn to the data analysis, which focuses on the students' observation reports, lesson plans, and class teaching. These three instruments were assessed by me during the module period in order to provide feedback to the students, and, to reach this study's objectives, I reassessed the instruments, focusing, more specifically, on students' practices in the light of the theoretical discussion phrase.

Furthermore, the content of a reflexive diary kept by me was used as data, too. For clarity sake, I use the terms 'project-students' and 'project-teacher' to differ from students and other teachers from the school. In the next section, I present the results and discussion divided in three subsections: (i) *class observation*, (ii) *lesson plans*, and (iii) *teaching practice*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Class observation

As already mentioned, the participants had to perform 26 hours of class observation, in which they were asked to reflect upon the language learning and teaching perspective the teacher followed, based on the theoretical discussions we had in the previous phrase of the project.

Due to the pandemic situation, classes were taught remotely through three educational tools: (i) *Lessons broadcasted live on TV*, (ii) *video-conference classes*, and (iii) *Activities and tests posted in the Google Classroom environment*. In addition, the project-teacher managed one WhatsApp group for each group of students she had, where students asked questions. Students who did not have access to the virtual tools received printed activities, designed by the teacher, fortnightly. These students needed to fetch the activities and return them to the school.

The project-students followed six high school groups of which the project-teacher was responsible for. In Brazil, our high school educational system consists of three levels: first, second and third years. From these 6 groups, 3 were from the first year, 2 from the second, and 1 from the third. They observed the broadcasted lessons, which random teachers conducted. Every lesson format was similar. The teacher presented, read and translated a text, and then proposed some reading-comprehension questions related to the text.

As the lessons were broadcasted online, the teacher tried to create a type of interaction with the students, even though they did not have any type of contact. For instance, the teacher gave two minutes for the students to answer the questions. In addition, grammar was approached only after students interpreted the text.

The video-conference classes were conducted by the project-teacher and other school teachers in a multidisciplinary way. Such configuration was necessary, since only few school students were able to participate in the classes due to lack of internet and technological access. There were three

classes a week, each one for (a) year group(s).

The project-teacher explored some topics during these lessons, such as Halloween, since the class occurred during this period, and grammar. She worked with reading and comprehension activities through some texts: quotes, lyrics, cartoons. First, she read the texts in English followed by its translation to Portuguese, explaining that we should be careful not to use literal translation, since we are dealing with languages, with different structures.

Finally, the Google Classroom environment was a space to review and reinforce the contents presented in the broadcasted lessons. Some activities were posted by the team in the Education Secretary dedicated in creating the broadcasted lessons and others by the project-teacher. The activities consisted in texts, grammar explanations, and tests.

Thus, the project-students concluded that the lessons they observed followed a language as system, discourse and ideology perspectives (Kumaravadivelu, 2008), because they approached language within a context through the use of texts first and explored grammar topics subsequently. The topics were diversified and opened room to explore language more critically, however only the project-teacher made an attempt to develop the students' critical competence in the video conference classes.

The project-students pointed out the direct translation as being problematic, since the teachers did not provide time for students to try to read the text by themselves. They questioned the project-teacher and she explained that this was necessary, since students' level of proficiency was low. The teaching perspective presented in the lessons was the Focus-on-FormS one, because, since,

even if the focus of the lesson was on exploring texts, the teachers and project-teachers translated them first, which focused on semantics, which disregards the context.

Lesson plans

Normally, the lesson plans are designed taking into consideration the groups observed, so that they can meet the students' needs (Long, 2005); nevertheless, a calendar situation hindered this practice. School and University calendars are similar, the school year begins in February and ends in December.

However, due to the pandemic, in the remote adaptation period, the beginning of many projects and the university calendar suffered a delay. This project only started in October and the school year of 2020 will only end in May/2021. The same did not occur in the schools, since the government installed the remote system in the first months of the beginning of the pandemic.

This created an incompatibility between the schools and universities' calendars. Thus, the practical phase of the project would only begin the year of 2021, which is a new school calendar year, so project-students had to design their lesson plans for new groups they did not know.

Taking this situation into account, the project-students designed ten broad lesson plans using as a basis the content worked in the broadcasted lessons. The context where these lessons would be administered was the Google Meet and the Google Classroom. Every lesson plan followed a similar structure: a theme introduction, and textual exploration, and the materials used were movies, places, advertisements, postcards, literary works, to cite but a few. The plans were connected, creating a development of content.

The project-students idealized the lesson plans in a Focus on Meaning perspective, exploring language as discourse and ideology. In some lesson plans, it was not possible, since they approached genre structure and accent differences, which are considered structural aspects of language.

Another discussion that emerged was that, even though they did not want to explore grammar, so that they could analyze how the class would go, in the teaching practice, students could ask for grammar and language structures explanations. This would not be considered a Focus on Meaning perspective, but a Focus on Form one, to be more specific, the strong version of the Focus on Form, proposed by Long (1991).

Teaching practice

Due to bureaucratic issues, the teaching practice did not occur as it had been planned, that is, with project-students implementing their lesson plans with the groups in the virtual spaces. In order to access the school environment, there were a number of documents each project-student had to fill in and sign, and they had already done it in the beginning of the project.

However, a new school year started in the school and, because of that, new documents had to be submitted. The issue was that the Education Secretary was busy dealing with new virtual implementations and could not deal with the documentation as quickly as needed. They only accepted the documents in the beginning of March, the last month of the first module, and they still check them. Considering the great number of state schools in Paraná, this checking process could take weeks.

Considering the situation, the university projects in general, not only the English one, had to put forward alternatives, so

that our students were able to experience this project phase. For the English project, we decided to produce video lessons.

With this new scenario, the project students had to readapt their lesson plans, so that they would fit in this new format. Their focus had to be changed, that is, instead of being prepared to have students' interaction, they needed (a) to learn how to create video lessons; (b) to design screenplay; (c) to edit the video classes, among others.

Despite the lack of experience, we had in designing video lessons, the result was impressive. They used a video recording platform called Loom, in which they managed to present their slides and their faces in a small circle that could be dragged around the screen, creating an interaction between them and the content they were presenting.

Their lessons, as planned, focused on presenting a theme and then working with it through texts, videos, songs, etc. They almost managed to create a Focus on Meaning environment, but it did not occur because they translated the texts right after reading them and focused on genre structure and accents, as aforementioned.

It is worth mentioning that the idea was not to criticize teaching perspectives. The project-students were interested in understanding how Focus on Meaning perspective worked, since they had not had contact with it before.

Analyzing the video lessons, the project-students, the project-teacher and I found some aspects to improve. In order to create a type of interaction with their future audience, after reading the texts in English, they could have asked the viewer to pause the video and try to read the text by themselves, focusing on reading strategies they knew, like looking for cognate and known words.

Another aspect was the translation, which even though they saw as problematic, they repeated it in their videos. We concluded that it was necessary due to the low proficiency in English students tend to have, however, it would not have been necessary to translate every text or activity. It is important that students develop autonomy in learning a language.

And the last aspect was related to the project-students' pronunciation. Some of them were still learning English and their proficiency was not high, so they mispronounced some words. We agreed that they should have checked the pronunciations they had difficulties in order to avoid mistakes.

CONCLUSIONS

The pandemic hindered the progress of the project, which had to be altered to fit in a virtual format. School calendars did not match, bureaucratic processes did not allow the participants access to the classes in the teaching practice, among other issues.

However, all in all, we managed to reach the project's main objective, which was to provide space for college students, who shall graduate as English teachers, to have contact with the school environment. Besides that, the project-participants were able to reflect upon their practices based on theoretical discussions we had had previously.

A downside we were able to observe was the fact that many school students did not have access to the classes via the internet, due to economical reasons. It only reinforces how Brazil still has to invest in social policies, so that, perhaps some day, we will have a more equal country. In the case of Paraná, the government, eager to implement a remote system for its schools, ignored the

fact that many students live under a critical economical situation.

This study presented and analyzed the practices of six students in one module of the project, who were tutored by one school teacher, that is, it was a small

scaled study. I suggest that future research encompasses all the modules of the project, with more students and teachers from different cities and regions, so that a bigger picture can be created.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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АНОТАЦІЯ / ABSTRACT [in Ukrainian]:

**ПЕДАГОГІЧНА ПРАКТИКА ТА ЇЇ ВИКЛИКИ В АНГЛІЙСЬКОМУ
ВИКЛАДАЦЬКОМУ ПРОЕКТІ БРАЗИЛЬСЬКОГО ДЕРЖАВНОГО УНІВЕРСИТЕТУ
ПІД ЧАС ПАНДЕМІЇ**

Мета цього рукопису – представити, проаналізувати та обговорити педагогічну практику, розроблену в рамках проекту з підготовки вчителів під назвою *Residência Pedagógica* («Педагогічна резиденція»), - проект, який уряд Бразилії пропонує бразильським університетам – для вирішення проблем під час пандемії. Більш конкретно, проект мав на меті зосередитись на практичній фазі першого модуля, коли учасники проекту спостерігали за заняттями в школі, розробляли плани уроків для груп для тих занять, за якими вони спостерігали, та потім проводили уроки для цих груп.

Методологія. У цьому дослідженні було застосовано якісний метод дослідження. Звіти, плани уроків та відеоуроки учасників проекту використовувались як дані для аналізу педагогічної практики у світлі теоретичної дискусії, проведеної під час проекту. Було введено також рефлексивний щоденник, який використовувався як дані. Більше того, педагогічна практика учасників була протиставлені ситуаціям, які траплялися в умовах пандемії.

Результати. Практичні етапи проекту не відбулися, як передбачалося; однак учасники змогли поміркувати над своєю педагогічною практикою на основі теоретичного обговорення, проведеного раніше в проекті. Вони визнали перспективи вивчення та викладання мови на уроках, за якими вони спостерігали, і в планах уроків, які вони розробили та реалізували. Пандемія мала значний вплив на проект, який потрібно було адаптувати, для завершення першого модуля.

Висновки. Незважаючи на пандемію, нам вдалося досягти головної мети проекту, яка полягала у забезпеченні простору для студентів коледжів, які випускатимуть викладачів англійської мови, для контакту із шкільним середовищем.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: Бразильський контекст, COVID-19, проект з викладання англійської мови, державні школи, педагогічна освіта.

RESUMO / ABSTRACT [in Portuguese]:

PRÁTICAS E SEUS DESAFIOS EM UM PROJETO DE ENSINO DE INGLÊS DE UMA UNIVERSIDADE PÚBLICA BRASILEIRA DURANTE A PANDEMIA

O **objetivo** deste artigo é apresentar, analisar e discutir as práticas desenvolvidas em um projeto de Formação de Professores chamado Residência Pedagógica – um projeto que o governo brasileiro oferece para as instituições brasileiras - e os seus desafios durante a pandemia. Mais especificamente, este artigo pretende focar na fase prática do primeiro módulo do projeto, que foi quando os participantes observaram aulas na escola, criaram planos de aula para os grupos cujas aulas observaram e implementaram as aulas para esses grupos.

Metodologia. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa. Os relatórios, planos de aulas e videoaulas produzidas pelos participantes do projeto foram usados como dados com o intuito de analisar as suas práticas sob a luz das discussões teóricas conduzidas durante o projeto. Um diário reflexivo mantido por mim também foi usado como dado. Ademais, as práticas dos participantes foram contrastadas com situações que ocorreram durante o contexto de pandemia.

Resultados. As fases práticas do projeto não ocorreram como previstas; entretanto, os participantes puderam refletir sobre as suas práticas baseados nas discussões teóricas conduzidas no projeto anteriormente. Eles reconheceram as perspectivas de ensino e aprendizagem de língua nas aulas que observaram e nos planos de aula que criaram e implementaram. A pandemia teve uma grande interferência no projeto, que teve que ser adaptado, para que o primeiro módulo pudesse ser concluído.

Conclusões. Apesar da pandemia, conseguimos alcançar o objetivo principal do projeto, que era abrir espaço para os licenciandos terem contato com o ambiente escolar.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: contexto brasileiro, COVID-19, projeto de ensino de inglês, escolas públicas, formação de professor.

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