Illustrating the Intercultural in Portuguese Secondary School Foreign Language (FL) Classrooms

Carla ULISSES and Nic HURST
| University of Porto (FLUP)

Abstract | This article reports on a small-scale action research project developed in the context of the practicum of a Teacher Education Masters course at the Faculty of Letters, the University of Porto. The project was focussed on the importance of visual stimuli in the foreign language teaching classroom (English and Spanish), within the context of an intercultural approach. Different strategies, activities and materials were employed with the general aim of helping the learners to develop their critical cultural awareness. The learners played a central role, participating actively, by bringing into the classroom their own knowledge of the world. Simultaneously, the role of the teacher was not without importance in this action research project, presenting herself as an example of a cultural mediator.

Key words| Interculturality, intercultural competence, images, foreign language teaching

Introduction

This article is based on an action research project which formed the basis of the final report conducted within the Masters in English and Spanish Teaching in 3rd Cycle of Basic and Secondary Education, a second cycle, post-graduate course offered by the Faculty of Letters, the University of Porto. The article is primarily the result of an exercise in reflection on the teaching practice, which took place in the academic year 2014/2015, carried out by the student teacher (Carla Ulisses), supported by her Faculty teaching practice supervisor (Nicolas Hurst). The action research project and teaching practice final report were intended to confirm the importance of an intercultural approach in the foreign language classroom and the relevance that images, as a teaching resource, can have within an intercultural approach to the FL teaching-learning process.

Theoretical Background

The globalized world in which we live is in a state of constant flux, an important element of which is ever-increasing approximation and contacts among a range of different cultures; the need for these cultures to relate to each other is self-evident and presents a challenge:

> If foreign language and culture teaching intends to prepare learners for the future, it needs to contribute to promoting learners' acquisition of the attitudes and skills required for interacting with people from differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It needs to present learners with opportunities to acquire plurilingual and multicultural competence. (Manjarrés 143)

We live, then, in an increasingly multicultural society, where much of what we experience is 'different' or 'unknown', a socio-cultural context capable of fostering situations of tension and conflict. It then becomes "indispensable to achieve real communication, an

understanding through mutual knowledge to reduce culture shock and prevent conflicts" (Oliveras 11).[1]

Intercultural communication, according to Byram et al. (2002), embraces five key elements or 'Savoirs': **Savoir être**: to do with attitudes and values, curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about own society, to experience and evaluate other cultural perspectives, to be tolerant and empathetic; **Savoir apprendre**: the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction, to be inquisitive yet polite; **Savoir s'engager**: an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries, to have a sensitive and balanced outlook; **Savoirs**: knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in your own and in another's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction, to be aware of national definitions of geographical and symbolic space, known as *Landeskunde* in German; **Savoir comprendre**: the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from your own community. At the most basic level, we are referring to having and/or developing an approach that recognizes respect for human dignity and equality of human rights as the democratic basis for all social interaction. We believe that this posture should be transversal and should be actively promoted in the teaching of any foreign language.

The school and specifically the foreign language classroom, being spaces where cultures intersect, become privileged places where the teaching/learning of cultural perspectives should be emphasized (see The European Commission report on 'Language Teaching and Learning in Multilingual Classrooms', 2015). This same concern with the cultural aspects is echoed in the documents governing teaching practice in our schools, in which intercultural competence is presented as one of the objectives to be achieved. For example, the learning objectives described for 'basic education' cycle in Portugal, published by the Ministry of

Education and Science in July, 2015, identify numerous categories and sub-categories of items under the heading of 'Intercultural Domain'.

In light of these considerations, it is relevant to mention that the school where this project was developed (*Escola Secundária Aurélia de Sousa*) has enshrined in its official policy the objectives of 'inclusion, responsibility and humanism'. These objectives are in harmony with the permanent spirit of open-mindedness required to face the challenges of the 21st century, and are consecrated in two defining principles: citizenship education and consistently high levels of achievement and quality. With this context, it was not unnatural that the school gave its full support to this action research project.

In addition, the two groups of learners who participated in this project showed, right from the beginning, a very positive attitude. The English language group consisted of 22 learners from the 11th grade. According to the CEFR classification these learners were at the level B2.2. They had a positive approach to learning English, seeing it as a useful survival tool in the current technological era and as value-added for their futures. A relatively homogeneous group, they were curious about the cultures of English-speaking communities. Given the initial class observations and feedback from the class teacher, they were identified as being responsive to visual stimuli. The Spanish language group consisted of 28 learners from the 9th grade; their CEFR level was A2.2. The majority of the group were curious and motivated to learn the Spanish language and about its culture(s). Within these 'restrictions' the decision was taken to work with these learners at developing their intercultural competence, by means of images.

Thanks largely to technological developments in the last 50 years, we live in a world in which images and visual information increasingly dominate our lives and the young, more so than anyone, are experts when it comes to accessing, sharing, processing and communicating with images. Moreover, the use of images to develop a cultural awareness becomes particularly attractive for teachers as they are able to make use of a resource that is already familiar to them:

[t]he power of images as an ELT resource has long been recognised, especially in specific areas, such as the teaching of vocabulary, but this undeniably useful 'power' can also be harnessed for a more diverse range of teaching/learning activities; for example, speaking or writing activities might benefit from the use of various different visual forms, such as art, photographs, advertisements, web--based and learner-generated images. (Hurst 22)

In this light, in this action research project, images occupied a prominent role as a teaching resource for the development of intercultural competences among the students who took part in the student teacher's assigned classes.

So that images can be at the service of intercultural approach in the foreign language teaching classroom, it is necessary for learners to develop their visual literacy as the "[v]isual language is not . . . transparent and universally understood; it is culturally specific . . . . Consequently different values and meanings are attached . . ." (Kress and Van Leeuwen 4). This means they will have to develop strategies and skills including observation, interpretation and cultural critical consciousness that, in a systematic way, then let them look at the images and talk about what kind of message they convey.

The Action Research Project

In practice, the action research project was organized in three cycles (each supervised) spread throughout the school year 2013/14 and were realized through the application of three taught units within which it was intended to develop intercultural competence through the use of images.

We began with the zero cycle where, through direct observation and the application of a questionnaire, it was possible to elaborate an initial diagnosis of the learning context. Thus, we found that the students had a lack of knowledge in relation to cultural aspects alongside the fact that these aspects were not always addressed in the classroom from an intercultural perspective. It was also found that in addressing these and other issues (of a more linguistic nature), visual aids, in particular images, were rarely employed.

Similarly, the questionnaire results came to show that for a significant part of students, cultural aspects were important in learning a language, despite their difficulty in defining them, consolidating the idea that this would be an area of student interest and that it should be treated in the classroom more explicitly and frequently, including through an intercultural approach. The question which arose then was whether we could fix upon images as a resource to develop intercultural competence and the second part of the survey served to prove the interest of students in this feature as a means to improve their learning. The zero cycle also made it possible to define and test the approach that would be followed in the subsequent cycles and which constituted the 'backbone' of the lesson plans that were developed and executed; this according to Ponce de Léon (252) should include:

1) Reflection by the students on their own culture and cultural behaviours;

2) Presentation of aspects of cultural behaviour from the target culture(s) and contrast with the students' culture(s);

3) Communicative or complex activities which put into practice and encourage assimilation of target culture behaviours.

With respect to the subsequent cycles, there follows a summary of the work undertaken as well as analysis and interpretation of the data resulting from the implementation of the action research project with the two target groups (Spanish and English), also making reference to the instruments used for data collection.

The First Cycle

Starting with the first cycle with the Spanish language group, it should be mentioned that the classes that were specific to this project were based around a theme that was not part of the usual Spanish programme for the term, the Spanish mentor having challenged her student teachers to develop their own teaching materials. The proposed theme was "Christmas in the Spanish speaking world". Given that this teaching unit would naturally have strong cultural

content focus it presented an optimal opportunity to work with intercultural aspects, based on the use of images. The timing of this unit, immediately preceding the Christmas holidays, contributed equally to giving "an emphasis to the instrumental value of the language since the new linguistic content could be learned, recycled, strengthened and systematized with the objective of discovering and carrying out a variety of tasks about a topic the learners find stimulating" (Estaire 7).

In the first lesson, the learners were organized into groups as they entered the room and each group was randomly given an image, representing the Spanish speaking country for which they would be responsible for throughout the unit. A PowerPoint presentation with images on the topic was employed to activate the learners' existing knowledge about their own culture and any information they had acquired in previous Spanish classes. Thus, the learners were able to exchange opinions and debate the various representations presented in a critical and constructive manner and from this point onwards compare cultural realities, promoting "reflection on their culture and on the target culture" (Ponce de León 249).

In the second lesson, the focus was on grammatical content, which, while contextualised and integrated into the theme of the unit, had less relevance in terms of the objectives of this action research project.

The third lesson consisted of the realisation of the task, namely making posters using images and small texts which represented the Christmas 'traditions' of each of the countries previously identified. This task constituted an opportunity for the learners to develop their creative and organizational abilities as well as involving them in negotiating as group members. The lesson ended with group oral presentations of their posters which allowed for further sharing of ideas and information among the learners. The student teachers were also able to directly observe during this phase how the impact of cultural contents through the use of images can have on the construction of understanding and attitudes among the learners.

Concluding, through the use of authentic materials and varied activities, promoting collaborative group work, it was possible to include each of the learners in tasks which called for

a personal and affective involvement as well as foreign language development and a different way to think about their own culture and the cultures of others. This certainly contributed to a development for a greater intercultural awareness among the learners.

In the first cycle of Spanish the more important instruments in data collection were direct observation, the work done by the students and self-assessment questionnaire, delivered at the end of the teaching unit.

From the start we noted the importance that the images had throughout this teaching unit, as a motivational resource, for student involvement in the activities proposed, for knowledge activation and as a discussion catalyst and consequently a source of momentum. Being representative of diverse cultural realities, the images constituted a stimulus source and provoked various emotions; these reactions stimulate, as Busto and Bedoya affirm: "creativity and the capacity to imagine, leading in turn to a positive relationship between the target language and the group in class" (4).

The production and presentation of posters, with information on the customs of various countries, each represented by a student, allowed them to adopt a truly intercultural approach with the students acting as cultural mediators, between their own culture and the target culture(s). When you put yourself in the shoes of the Other, it "contributes to the appreciation of cultural diversity" and "the education of citizens and democratic citizens, respectful of diversity and aware of their cultural identity and that of others" (Tato 224-5).

Concerning the first cycle of English, the action research project was applied within the teaching unit designated "Diversity Matters", itself within the larger theme of "Multiculturalism", whose principal objectives are referred to explicitly in the national programme for the 11th grade, namely with respect to the socio-cultural and intercultural dimension identified for the teaching--learning of English (Moreira et al., 2001-2003). Reference should also be made here that images played a key role as a learning instrument in all of the lessons, hoping to assist the learners in being more conscious of the importance of the socio-cultural and intercultural

dimensions of learning a foreign language and also in the construction of their own identities, being themselves agents of interculturality.

The first lesson focussed on cultural diversity. Various images were used to help the learners develop a thematic framework and allow them to predict elements of the topic in question. As Harmer states, "[t]his use of pictures is very powerful and has the advantage of engaging the students in the task to follow" (135-6). In addition, the images assist the learners in activating their previously acquired knowledge and also develop their abilities to reflect critically and interact with their peers. In this way, the learners become more conscious of the Anglo-American context in relation to this topic and by using strategies requiring comparison with their own cultural contexts can construct new understandings and new attitudes.

What followed was a listening task preceded by the visualization of two images of adolescents. The learners were asked to speculate about the origins of the adolescents, to interact orally with their classmates, to participate with their individual feelings, thoughts and opinions, recognizing these as having value in the teaching-learning process. The activity resulted in the 'deconstruction' of the images allowing the learners to challenge their own pre--conceived ideas and interpretations. After listening to the two adolescents give their 'testimonies' about living in multicultural communities, the learners answered some questions aimed at helping them to construct a deeper understanding of the topic.

In the second lesson, in much the same way as occurred in the teaching unit of the first cycle of Spanish, the focus was on grammatical content, not as directly relevant to the execution of this action research project.

The third lesson in this unit had as its primary objective the realization of a simulation type activity, namely a role play. As Harmer has pointed out: "Many students derive great benefit from simulation and role play. Students 'simulate' a real-life encounter . . . as if they were doing so in the real world, either as themselves . . . or taking on the role of a character different from themselves or with thoughts and feelings they do not necessarily share" (276).

The lesson started with the viewing of a video clip called "Diversified We Grow"[2] produced by 'Cultural Infusion' whose main purpose was to make connections with the topic dealt with in the previous lessons and also prepare the learners for the subsequent activities. A pre-speaking session served to clarify the 'rules' of the role play and provide a framework for the activity. Thus, the learners worked with their coursebooks where a series of arguments (for and against) about multiculturalism were presented.

In turn, the learners received a role card on which was described a situation and the 'position' they had to assume in that situation. Even though these positions did not necessarily correspond to their true position, the learners had to persuade their classmates that their opinion was indeed correct. Thus, this unit served as an example of how, as well as focusing improving our learners' linguistic capacities, we may also help them grow as informed citizens, being both aware and critical of our world.

In the first cycle of English, with regard to the collection of data, similar strategies were employed as in the case of Spanish. Through direct observation it was possible to determine, right from the outset, the difficulty the students had in 'reading' images in order to understand what those images represented, beyond the obvious. There is no doubt that this difficulty is frequently the result of preconceived ideas and stereotypes that need to be deconstructed. This "[g]iven the digital age in which we live, it is important that we begin to study these images with a critical eye to develop visual literacy in class" (Goldstein 19).

As regards the role-play activity, this was particularly interesting, taking into account the reaction of the students, since for many of them it involved leaving their comfort zones, having to adopt postures that did not coincide with theirs, thereby increasing their awareness of these postures, their preparedness to communicate with others, their tolerance of diversity and their ability to face day-to-day problems that could be encountered in a foreign country; using an experiential approach to encourage their observation, perception and awareness of the subtleties of different cultural behaviours (Byram et al.).

The Second Cycle

The theme which was under consideration in the second cycle of Spanish of this action research project was "Do Good without Looking at Who". This teaching unit consisted of a series of three 50 minute lessons and dealt with concepts related to social problems, social solidarity (and their public reporting), the expression of desires and relationships of cause and effect.

Within this teaching unit, the aim of continuing the development of the learners' intercultural competence remained central. In fact, in the Cervantes Institute's curriculum (1997), in the chapter on intercultural competences and attitudes, we find the affirmation that:

> Intercultural competence means in a way, an extension of the social personality of the student . . . and intercultural awareness, i.e., knowledge, perception and understanding of the similarities and differences between their world of origin and the communities of Spain and Spanish-speaking countries, in all its diversity and free of stereotypes. (Instituto Cervantes)

With respect to the lessons themselves, they followed a 'classic' task-based framework in which, during the first two and at the beginning of the third lesson, the learners were presented with a series of preliminary tasks which would enable them to achieve the final task: writing a letter to denounce a social problem.

Once again, teaching materials included images (in this case, cartoons and photographs) with the aim of drawing the learners' attention to social problems, NGOs and famous personalities who play a role in seeking solutions to these problems; thus, it was hoped to foster a sense of solidarity, tolerance and respect with regard to other cultures (in this case, the Spanish and Hispano-American) with which we, in Portugal, share many common concerns.

The first class focussed on activating the learners' existing knowledge; this was achieved through the description of photographs that depicted an actual social problem which their classmate tried to identify. The aim here was to simultaneously develop oral interaction

among the learners and also develop their abilities to negotiate, deduce, collaborate as well as their visual literacy (Corbett).

In this lesson, the learners were also informed as to their final task, providing them with further contextualization and a reason for the following activity: a listening. This approach took into account the words of Watkins: "native speakers always have a reason for listening to something. . . . This reason for listening needs to be replicated in the classroom" (65). This listening consisted of an interview with Fernando Alonso, the Spanish Formula One driver, who is also a 'Goodwill Ambassador' for the United Nations. It permitted the learners to encounter important ideas related to the theme of this unit through the use of varied and authentic materials which had a clear intercultural perspective and which required the learners to obtain information important for the realization of their language learning tasks.

Later in the lesson, the learners were asked to adopt a position similar to that of Fernando Alonso and they should reflect and speculate as to possible solutions to the social problems depicted in the photographs they had earlier described, under the heading of "Ideas to Change the World". Their suggestions were then discussed in open class, giving rise to a moment of contextualised debate and sharing which was very important for their intercultural learning. To finish the lesson, the learners were asked to identify a local (community or school) social problem they thought should be solved and provide a photograph which might document this issue. In this way, the intention was to promote a deeper understanding of social problems and a reflection on possible solutions in addition to creating a personalised and affective connection with the problems of others (that might also be theirs), in the world around them.

The second lesson was principally concerned with grammatical content; the cultural contents dealt with in the first lesson served as a starting point for their contextualization, the presentation materials employed were cartoons:

The intercultural approach to language learning must offer students tools that can facilitate observation, analysis, interpretation and understanding of cultural differences as necessary steps for

the acquisition of intercultural competence. All this can be achieved through activities in which the formal aspects of language are integrated as well as cultural and facilitate the development of the necessary skills. In this regard, the cartoon is revealed as an ideal instrument for this purpose because it meets both requirements. (Alonso Abal 36)

Furthermore, according to the same author, the cartoon reflects an ideology and a way of seeing the world that is more or less subliminal:

Thereby constituting an especially interesting material for students to observe and interpret the cultural and sociocultural keys to the community they wish to access, overcoming and neutralizing filters and stereotypes and, in the process, activating a body of knowledge, attitudes and procedures strategically that allow them to get closer to the Hispanic cultures. (Alonso Abal 58)

The last lesson of this teaching unit had as its main aim the fulfilment of their final task: writing a letter. The learners, having already been challenged to propose action in relation to social problems that they had noticed in their day-to-day routines, in their communities, were asked to individually express in writing their ideas. The hope is that these learners can develop their intercultural competence sufficiently so as to become better informed citizens, more aware and more critical of our multicultural world, and, in a certain way, help them become 'better' people for the rest of their lives.

In the second cycle of Spanish, in line with what occurred in the first cycle, the same data collection techniques were employed. Here again, through direct observation, we could confirm the importance of images in this teaching unit, on the one hand because they represent aspects that characterize a culture and on the other hand, to be realistic, since they also include negative or problematic aspects of this culture. Because the images addressed issues of a certain universal nature, it provided the students with the opportunity to reflect and discuss their own culture and the culture of the "Other", inviting them to build a new perspective and appropriate behaviour when in contact with members of other cultural communities.

Moreover, having to carry out a written assignment meant that students would use the linguistic and cultural content covered in previous lessons giving voice to their interpretation of the world around them, making them more aware of that world. In this sense, this activity was certainly an opportunity for the growth of this group of students as potential intercultural agents and contributed to the development of their skills in observation, analysis, interpretation and understanding, taking into account the fact that one of the principle aims of the FL classroom should nowadays include providing opportunities for acting as responsible, cosmopolitan citizens, without implying the loss of cultural or ideological roots (Guilherme, "English as a Global Language and Education for Cosmopolitan Citizenship").

The second cycle of English in this action research project consisted of three lessons of 50 minutes each, included in the general theme of "Work Trends", which is explicitly stated as being part of the socio-cultural and intercultural dimension referred to in the national programme for the 11th grade (Moreira et al., 2001-2013). The development of the learners' visual literacy, through the use of images as teaching materials, once again assumed a central role in the entire teaching-learning process helping the learners to identify ideas, concepts and words.

The main topic that was covered in the first lesson was new tendencies in the world of work and the workplace. The intention was for the learners to reflect on and discuss these topics making use of some projected images which helped them activate their previous knowledge and then negotiate and construct new ideas and opinions related to any eventual meanings they could discern in the images. To paraphrase Harmer (135-6), images may assume a critical importance in the teaching-learning process since they can be used in many different ways, for example, the promotion of moments of discussion, simply because they can stimulate the asking of so many questions. These activities were important in helping the learners become more aware of how the world of work is evolving, not only from a global perspective but also from a local one.

The second lesson, following the indications of the teaching practice mentor, was dedicated to grammatical contents, and as such not so relevant to the action research project. The third lesson, however, had as its main aim the realization of a role play type activity.

The learners were initially asked to watch a video clip, a report related to the topic, and to obtain information that would be useful for the oral interaction in pairs that was to follow. As Harmer has suggested:

> Seeing language in use: one of the main advantages of video is that students do not just hear language, they see it too. This greatly aids comprehension, since for example, general meaning and moods are often conveyed through expression, gesture . . . and other visual clues; Cross-cultural awareness: video uniquely allows students a look at situations far beyond their classrooms. (282)

Before the actual role play, the learners were given some orientation as to the 'rules' of the activity and also some additional input as to main topics to be included. The interactions were prompted by the use of cards with photographs showing different workplaces, the main idea being that they should discuss their opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of the locations. As a follow-up activity, the learners shared their opinions and conclusions in open class, highlighting the different types of argument and language employed. All members of the class had the opportunity to express their opinions on each other's input without forgetting the boundaries of mutual respect and comprehension of difference:

> An intercultural dimension involves learners in sharing their knowledge with each other and discussing their opinions. There need to be agreed rules for such discussions based on an understanding of human rights and respect for others. Learners thus learn as much from each other as from the teacher, comparing their own cultural context with the unfamiliar contexts to which language learning introduces them. (Byram et al. 26)

The key here is that learning depends not only on individuals but also on interaction with others, without which it is unlikely that the learners will become reflective and critical cultural mediators with a sense of individual responsibility in relation to their own learning.

In the second cycle of English, through direct observation, we were able to immediately see the change in the students' posture; more specifically, with regard to the interpretation of the images. If the first class worked with this group, we encountered an almost total lack of interest in image analysis (no doubt we were facing an inexperienced group at this level), in this later class, they immediately began to deconstruct the images, with various interpretations as to what was referred to across a range of possibilities, exchanging views, debating ideas and creating new interpretations.

Regarding the role-play, here also the stance adopted by the students diverged from that observed in the first cycle, showing a large openness, actively assuming the role that they had been proposed by their teacher, and even if volunteering to come to the front of the class in order to defend "their" new opinions.

No doubt here we can accommodate the premise that characterizes the intercultural approach, according to which we must engage our students in sharing their knowledge and discussing their views, thereby building their knowledge, learning as much from each other as from the teacher, comparing their own cultural context with the new contexts presented in the teaching-learning process.

The questionnaire delivered at the end of the second cycle to the two groups was prepared based on what had been presented in the zero cycle, but now had as its aim: to comprehend to what extent the degree of importance attributed to cultural aspects in learning a foreign language varied, as well as judging the degree of importance attached to images as a teaching resource in the service of Interculturalism, throughout this action research project.

With respect to the first element, the most significant results were obtained from Question Five, which referred to the degree of importance attributed to the use of images in the understanding of the content and acquisition of knowledge: 93% of the Spanish group and 91% of the English group agreed.

As much for the percentages reported here, as from the direct observation in the classroom, it became obvious that the systematic use of images in the classroom was a winning

bet, leading to a higher level of consciousness with regard to the importance of this procedure in the teaching-learning among the students themselves. Just such a position is advocated by Goldstein: "I believe that we have to re-interpret the role of images in the foreign language classroom and ensure that images become more visible and more influential within our work" (23).

We may also highlight Question Nine which made it possible, with regard to the Spanish group, confirm the interest that students had shown since the beginning of this project in the importance of comparing and contrasting cultures. Regarding the English group considered that this comparison, on the one hand helped them to be aware of their own culture and on the other hand, allowed them to respect differences and be more tolerant, thus being able to achieve several of the key objectives of an intercultural approach.

This project attempted to develop and put into practice, in all the classes that fell within this action research project, "a set of methodological proposals for foreign language teaching aimed at encouraging student reflection on their own culture and the target culture" (Ponce de Léon 249). In this context, also relevant to this discussion are the results from Question Thirteen; these show that 93% of the Spanish students and 87% of the English students considered that their understanding of Portuguese culture had been modified over the academic year: a gratifyingly strong indication of the success of the intercultural approach employed. The use of authentic materials, in this case the incorporation of images as a teaching tool, in this process of increasing awareness of change provided the opportunity for the students to experience a contextualized and meaningful learning experience.

Conclusion

This action research project showed the relevance that the study of cultural traits has for students, not only those aspects that relate to the target culture, but also those which identify their own culture. The awareness of this fact led the students through a process of reflection and comparison, to develop strategies that included critical observation, sharing opinions and interpretations, all grounded on the principle of an understanding for human rights and respect

for others. As a result, these students were able to develop skills that will allow them to interact with people from other cultures, from the standpoint of the deconstruction of prejudices, of understanding and acceptance that other people/cultures may be the carriers of different perspectives, values and behaviours; this with the certainty, however, that this interaction and these differences give rise to personal enrichment, as human beings. Also through this project, the importance of the images, as a teaching resource, became evident given their capacity to promote the development of intercultural skills, challenging concepts, stimulating debate and the sharing of ideas, challenging generalizations or stereotypes, leading students to decentralize and rediscover themselves.

The action research process involved permanent reflection on the part of the student teacher, leading to an awareness that the intercultural dimension of learning extends beyond the classroom and is relevant to the concept of education being an ongoing, lifelong phenomenon. In this sense, the training of teachers based on an intercultural approach could be a winning bet, but one which requires new educational guidelines, with the objective of "constructing spirits that are open to cultural difference and healthy human co-habitation . . . in a world that is certainly subject to an explosion of diversity" (Carneiro qtd. in Bizarro and Braga 68). FL education is uniquely placed in the school curriculum to fulfil this role and would do well to embrace the challenge of contributing as effectively as possible to shaping the vision that young people have of their world, to helping them become 'critical intercultural citizens' (Guilherme, "The Intercultural Dimension of Citizenship Education in Portugal").

Notes

[1] All non-English quotations translated by these authors.

[2] The video-clip "Diversified We Grow" is available at the 'Escola Virtual' website, published by Porto Editora.

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APPENDIX

Questionário

Caro(a) aluno(a)

Tens em mãos um questionário que gostaria que preenchesses visto que será uma peça fundamental para o meu projeto de investigação – ação.

O questionário é anónimo e as respostas confidenciais, pelo que não deves escrever o teu nome em nenhuma parte do mesmo. Salientamos que não há respostas corretas ou incorretas.

As línguas da minha família

1. A minha família é

    a. Monolingue (indica a língua) _____

    b. Bilingue (indica as línguas) _____

    c. Multilingue (indica as línguas) _____

Sobre o meu processo de aprendizagem

2. Eu aprendo melhor quando (escolhe duas respostas)

    a. Há imagens a acompanhar o texto

    b. Represento papéis

    c. Tomo parte em jogos

    d. Vejo as palavras escritas

    e. Vejo palavras e imagens

3. Compreendo melhor um texto escrito quando (escolhe duas respostas)

a. O conteúdo do texto me interessa

b. Tomo nota das palavras que considero importantes para a compreensão do conteúdo

c. Alguém me explica as palavras desconhecidas

d. Alguém me orienta a leitura através de exercícios

e. Vem acompanhado de imagens que ilustram o texto

4. Compreendo melhor um texto falado ou gravado quando (escolhe duas respostas)

a. Tenho a oportunidade de ouvir a gravação várias vezes

b. Ouço primeiro uma pessoa a falar/apresentar o texto e depois tenho hipótese de ouvir a gravação

c. Tomo notas

d. Posso falar com alguém sobre o texto

e. Posso mostrar/identificar imagens sobre aquilo que entendi

5. Consigo aprender melhor as palavras quando (escolhe duas respostas)

a. As escrevo várias vezes

b. Me recordo de situações em que as ouvi

c. Tomo nota de grupos de palavras relacionadas com um tema

d. As utilizo numa conversa ou num pequeno texto

e. As associo a uma/várias imagens

6. As minhas atividades preferidas são (escolhe duas respostas)

a. Ler textos

b. Ouvir: histórias, diálogos, canções,…

c. Participar em debates, simulações, role-play

d. Visualizar imagens

e. Visualizar/ouvir vídeos

7. Os meus materiais preferidos são (escolhe duas respostas)

    a. Canções/músicas

    b. Filmes/vídeos

    c. Gravações/transcrições auditivas

    d. Imagens e fotos/ilustrações

    e. Textos/diálogos

Eu, a língua inglesa e a cultura

8. A língua inglesa é

    a. Muito fácil de aprender

    b. Relativamente fácil de aprender

    c. Difícil de aprender

9. O que consideras mais importante nas aulas de Inglês? (escolhe duas respostas)

    a. Aprender vocabulário

    b. Escrever textos

    c. Realizar exercícios de gramática

    d. Descobrir a cultura, os costumes, as tradições e as pessoas de países onde se fala inglês

    e. Falar com os colegas em inglês

10. Dos conceitos apresentados em seguida assinala aqueles que associas a cultura? (escolhe duas respostas)

    a. Geografia

    b. Política

    c. Educação

    d. Meios de comunicação (TV, rádio, jornais, revistas)

e. Religião

f. Personalidades e acontecimentos sociais e históricos

g. Literatura

h. Música

i. Cinema

j. Família

k. Tradições

11. É importante comparar a nossa cultura com a de outros países nas aulas de inglês porque (escolhe duas respostas)

    a. Nos ajuda a ter consciência da nossa própria cultura e da dos outros

    b. Nos permite respeitar as diferenças e ser mais tolerantes

    c. Nos dá a possibilidade de desenvolver a nossa oralidade

    d. Nos possibilita perceber as diferenças gramaticais entre a língua portuguesa e a língua inglesa

    e. Nos permite ultrapassar ideias feitas sobre outras culturas

12. Consideras importante estudar temas de cultura nas aulas de Inglês?

    a. Muito importante

    b. Importante

    c. Normal

    d. Pouco importante

    e. Nada importante

Obrigada pela tua colaboração!

Questionário

Caro(a) aluno(a)

Tens em mãos um questionário que gostaria que preenchesses visto que será uma peça fundamental para o meu projeto de investigação – ação.

O questionário é anónimo e as respostas confidenciais, pelo que não deves escrever o teu nome em nenhuma parte do mesmo. Salientamos que não há respostas corretas ou incorretas.

Sobre o meu processo de aprendizagem

1. Eu aprendi melhor quando (escolhe uma resposta)

    a. Não havia imagens

    b. Havia imagens

2. Compreendi melhor um texto escrito quando (escolhe uma resposta)

    a. Não vinha acompanhado de imagens que ilustravam o texto

    b. Vinha acompanhado de imagens que ilustravam o texto

3. Compreendi melhor um texto falado ou gravado quando (escolhe uma resposta)

    a. Não pude mostrar/identificar imagens sobre aquilo que entendi

    b. Pude mostrar/identificar imagens sobre aquilo que entendi

4. Consegui aprender melhor as palavras quando (escolhe uma resposta)

    a. Não as associei a uma/várias imagens

    b. As associei a uma/várias imagens

5. Que grau de importância atribuis ao uso das imagens na compreensão dos conteúdos e aquisição de conhecimentos? (Escolhe uma resposta)

a. Nada importante

b. Pouco importante

c. Normal

d. Importante

e. Muito importante

Eu, a língua inglesa e a cultura

6. Os temas apresentados em língua inglesa foram: (Escolhe uma resposta)

a. Difíceis de aprender

b. Relativamente fáceis de aprender

c. Muito fáceis de aprender

7. Consideraste importante descobrir a cultura, os costumes, as tradições e as pessoas de países onde se fala inglês? (escolhe uma resposta)

a. Não

b. Talvez

c. Sim

8. Das áreas apresentadas em seguida assinala as que consideras fundamentais para uma cultura: (Escolhe duas respostas)

Geografia		Acontecimentos sociais e históricos	
Política		Literatura	
Educação		Música	
Meios de Comunicação		Cinema	
Religião		Família	
Personalidades		Tradições	

9. Foi importante comparar a nossa cultura com a de outros países nas aulas de inglês porque: (escolhe duas respostas)

    a. Nos ajudou a ter consciência da nossa própria cultura e da dos outros

    b. Nos permitiu respeitar as diferenças e ser mais tolerantes

    c. Nos deu a possibilidade de desenvolver a nossa oralidade

    d. Nos possibilitou perceber as diferenças gramaticais entre a língua portuguesa e a língua inglesa

    e. Nos permitiu ultrapassar ideias feitas sobre outras culturas

10. Consideraste importante estudar temas de cultura nas aulas de inglês? (Escolhe uma resposta)

    a. Nada importante

    b. Pouco importante

    c. Normal

    d. Importante

    e. Muito importante

11. O teu entendimento sobre a cultura inglesa mudou ao longo deste ano letivo depois de tudo o que aprendeste? (Escolhe uma resposta)

    a. Não. Nada mudou.

    b. Sim. Um Pouco.

    c. Sim. Mudou muito.

12. Se a resposta foi positiva, justifica dizendo porquê e como mudou o teu entendimento sobre a cultura inglesa.

_____

_____

13. O teu entendimento sobre a cultura portuguesa mudou ao longo deste ano letivo depois de tudo o que aprendeste? (Escolhe uma resposta)

    a. Não. Nada mudou.

    b. Sim. Um Pouco.

    c. Sim. Mudou muito.

14. Se a resposta foi positiva, justifica dizendo porquê e como mudou o teu entendimento sobre a cultura portuguesa.

_____

_____

Obrigada pela tua colaboração!