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An e-journal of Teacher Education and Applied Language Studies

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An e-journal of Teacher Education and Applied Language Studies

Doing It by the Book: Training Student Teachers at the Faculty of Letters, the University of Porto (FLUP) to Evaluate English Language Teaching (ELT) Materials

Nic HURST
| University of Porto (CETAPS)

Abstract | Understanding what the use of a coursebook implies is at the heart of any consideration of how ELT instruction in Portugal operates and, as such, should also be central to any pre-service teacher education. Since the curricular reorganization prompted by the 'Bologna Process', the Faculty of Letters, the University of Porto (FLUP) has included within its 'Masters in English and other Foreign Language Teaching' course (*Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês e de Alemão / Francês / Espanhol no 3.º ciclo do Ensino Básico e no Ensino Secundário*) an optional, one semester subject called the "Production of Didactic Materials". This talk will demonstrate and discuss how, in this case, training student teachers to develop a criteria based framework for evaluating FL teaching materials, and applying that same framework, can be considered a way of re-focusing the traditionally, largely theoretical, lecture-based training courses typical of the Portuguese paradigm.

Key words | English coursebooks, materials evaluation, criteria based approach, teacher training

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Various authors claim a very wide range of items fall under the heading of 'ELT materials'; for example, Tomlinson ("Introduction" 2) refers to "anything which is used by teachers or learners to facilitate learning a language", including items such as videos (traditional and YouTube), emails, product packaging and grammar books. However, for the purposes of this discussion, 'ELT materials' are here taken to mean Portuguese-produced coursebooks. Understanding what the use of a coursebook implies is at the heart of any consideration of how ELT instruction operates and, as such, should also be central to any pre-service teacher education. Indeed, research has shown that less experienced teachers rely more heavily on the coursebook as a core curricular guide than experienced teachers who tend to be more selective and make more use of their own materials (Tsui). Throughout Portugal, there are very few mainstream ELT classrooms in the state system that function without a coursebook being present. In this light, and according to UNESCO, the coursebook is "the core learning medium composed of text and/or images designed to bring about a specific set of learning outcomes; traditionally a printed and bound book including illustrations and instructions to facilitating sequences of learning activities".

In Portugal, different schools adopt a particular ELT coursebook from a list of Ministry of Education 'approved' titles for each level of instruction according to their own criteria. The approval process is characterized by a high degree of centralization, perhaps a reflection of what the prevailing view of the 'function' of education is: "[t]extbooks also typically reflect society's values and aspirations of a nation. These are the visible, tangible and practical manifestation of the curriculum, designed to teach students what the governmental authorities believe must be taught" (Mahmood 159). Thus, there is a top-down implementation of an 'educational policy' which places coursebooks in a crucial position in the teaching-learning process, mitigating what is permissible or legitimate in the classroom (Ghosn); but, consideration also needs to be given to a more socio-political perspective on coursebooks: "[a]s part of the curriculum, they participate in no less than the organised knowledge system of society. . . . They help set the cannons of truthfulness and, as such, also create a major reference point for what knowledge, culture, belief, and morality

really are" (Apple 182). It still remains true nowadays, in the age of the Internet, that coursebooks, with their authorised, official status, have a centrality and symbolic value that goes beyond whatever their educational merit may, or may not, be.

Coursebooks are important **artifacts** in the educational landscape, a key element in determining learning outcomes in combination with other factors, such as the **participants** (learners and teachers), the **processes** (the actions or activities that occur within the learning-teaching space) and the **structures** (institutions, curricula, power-holders); working together this non-exclusive list of factors shapes what has been called "the classroom ecology" (Guerrattaz and Johnston 782), an approach which stresses the interrelatedness of classroom life. Pre-service teachers need to understand the role of ELT materials in the context of providing opportunities or affordances for learning to take place. Since there is little research available to describe how teachers use ELT materials in their actual classrooms (Harwood), perhaps the most utilitarian approach in the context of pre-service teacher education is therefore to rely more on the extensive body of work related to materials development, design and evaluation to 'equip' our novice teachers with the wherewithal to make informed judgements about the locally produced commercial materials that dominate the Portuguese educational context.

The commercialization of coursebooks in Portugal has become central to the business activities of several local publishing houses. Marketing exercises take place regularly all around the country, in various different contexts: for example, at teacher association conferences and at special promotional events, often in the guise of 'teacher development' sessions and 'workshops'. This is a prime opportunity to get the latest publications directly into the hands of teachers, very often literally by giving away 'inspection copies'. The costs of such activities combined with the expense of actually producing a full-colour learners' coursebook with its sophisticated design and layout (along with all the 'accessories' that make up the 'package', especially the teacher's book and the digital resources) may in fact mean that publishers are less able to invest in the pedagogical quality of the 'product': "[p]ublishers who spend money on elaborate advertisement of their textbooks, and for training teachers how to use them, sell; those who do not spend, do

not sell, no matter what the quality of the textbook is" (Dendrinos 34). Unofficial estimates put the size of the Portuguese school book market at 10 million copies or 100 million euros (ORE report 2011) or 56 million euros in 2004 according to one report by the Portuguese publishers' association APEL (2005).

It is essential that early career teachers are well-informed as to how coursebooks can and should be evaluated if they are to participate in the selection process that occurs in schools all over the country every Spring. In response to this need, since the curricular reorganization prompted by the 'Bologna Process', the Faculty of Letters, the University of Porto (FLUP) has included within its 'Masters in English and other Foreign Language Teaching' course (*Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês e de Alemão / Francês / Espanhol no 3.º ciclo do Ensino Básico e no Ensino Secundário*) (MEIBS) the optional one semester subject known as 'The Production of Didactic Materials for ELT' (or PMDI). One of the main objectives of this curricular unit is to guide student teachers towards an awareness of the need to develop a criteria based framework for evaluating ELT materials. The student teachers are given the opportunity to apply the same framework that they have generated, a procedure which can also be considered a way of re-focusing the largely theoretical, lecture-based training courses typical of the Portuguese university paradigm. Each student teachers brings a knowledge base (personal, local, practical and usable) and a unique set of second language learning experiences to the PMDI course which can be sourced as a way to contribute to a more meaningful, interactive learning experience (situated and negotiated) than a more traditional transmission model allows (Mann).

The MEIBS course was conceived in 2008/2009 as a post-Bologna-style two-year Masters' in Teacher Education, focusing on the training of student teachers in two foreign languages. The first year consists basically of theoretical input at FLUP and the second year consists largely of teaching practice placement in local schools, under FLUP supervision. The PMDI course is only two hours per week, for one semester, giving a total of approximately 30 contact hours, for three ECTS. The basic aims of the PMDI course are:

- to discuss the features and functions of coursebooks
- to establish criteria to evaluate coursebooks and carry out a critical evaluation
- to analyse the role and characteristics of supplementary materials
- to produce supplementary materials for a designated 'skeleton' lesson plan

Of these basic aims, the discussion here will focus on the first two. Here it should be stated that the PMDI course is founded on the belief that all teaching is local, that the student teachers need usable content knowledge, appropriate to the Portuguese context and is not based on "the assumption that it is necessary to provide teachers with discrete amounts of disciplinary knowledge, usually in the form of general theories and methods that are assumed to be applicable to any teaching context" (Johnson and Freeman 55).

The main purpose of the first half of PMDI course is, thus, to help the student teachers develop a 'critical eye' in relation to Portuguese-produced ELT coursebooks. They need to realise that the contents, structure and format of the coursebooks they will be required to use are all impacted by the need of publishers to generate high sales and to produce profit. Furthermore, they need to recognize that teachers are targeted by publishers who try to produce coursebooks which require as little as possible preparation time, learners are likewise targeted by basing materials on the experiences of a locally identifiable peer group and both are targeted with exercises that are easily achievable with definite 'right' answers (with a low level of intellectual challenge). While this description may not fit all published materials on all occasions, it is certainly true with respect to recently published 'packages' in which teachers receive along with their teachers' book (complete with key), a whole range of pre-prepared tests, extra activity suggestions, lesson plans, web-links, multimedia resources, supplementary worksheets and so on; in addition, coursebooks are swamped with as much 'youth culture' content as possible (supposedly to connect with the learners' interests and 'motivate' them), verbal and visual texts featuring celebrities abound with a special predominance for so-called 'listening comprehension' tasks related to 'pop' songs (as was pointed out more than twenty years ago, see Dendrinos 35).

So, where to start? At FLUP, we begin by considering what the role of coursebooks in the teaching-learning process is. Initially, this consists largely of lecturer-led input based on readings of authors such as Sheldon; Cunningsworth (*Evaluating and Selecting EFL Teaching Material* and *Choosing your Coursebook*); Ellis; and Nunan. The emphasis then shifts and the student teachers are asked to consider what coursebooks actually contain/offer their users; this brainstorm-style activity is conducted in pairs or small groups making reference to a random selection of recently published local titles. This activity in 2014/2015 produced the following list of coursebook contents:

Comprehension exercises	Self-assessment tasks
Reading texts	Skills development
Grammar exercises	Lead-in activities
Vocabulary work	Listening texts and tasks
Pronunciation activities	Writing tasks
Explanations	Reference sections
Illustrations	Supplementary worksheets
Additional materials	Cultural content
Follow-up activities	Multimedia materials
Progress tests	Dictionary work
Test preparation work	Project work
Appendices (glossary)	

This is entirely student teacher-generated content and is open to discussion within the group, with additional comments and explanations being provided according to individual needs and understanding. An atmosphere of 'critical co-operation' is established from the outset of the course through this brainstorming and the subsequent task: trying to organize these different elements under headings (into categories). Participation is viewed as vital to this process of teacher

learning, the student teachers working through common 'problems' in pursuit of a shared goal, moving towards creating what has become known as a "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger 15): learning emerges through social interaction in this 'teacher education' classroom, just as it does in the ELT classroom.

The ultimate objective of these PMDI classes is to get the student teachers to produce their checklist. While recognising that using a checklist is not the only, or necessarily, the most effective way to evaluate a coursebook, at this level of pre-service teacher training, it offers a structured and practical foundation to ELT materials evaluation (see Tomlinson, "Materials evaluation", and Mukundan and Ahour, for extensive criticism and alternatives to the checklist approach). In this case, the student teachers themselves generate the categories they want to use in their checklists (one per pair/small group) and discuss how the components listed in the previous brainstorm can 'fit' into the categories. A key belief here is that through this type of collaborative, co-operative work, the student teachers will facilitate their awareness and enhance the plausibility of their conclusions (Prabhu). The categories suggested in 2014/2015 were:

1. Physical characteristics
2. Language work (grammar and vocabulary)
3. Cultural content
4. Skills development
5. Methodology
6. Supplementary materials

These categories also help to highlight the fact that coursebooks contain much more than just 'language work (grammar and vocabulary)' so being a language teacher means much more than dealing with grammar and vocabulary.

Before embarking on a more detailed development of the criteria that could fall into each category, some further input for the student teachers was deemed appropriate. Eight general

principles of coursebook evaluation are outlined at the website of the Best European Learning Materials Award (www.belma-award.eu), under the auspices of the European Educational Publishers Group (EEPG). This award has been in existence since 2009 and is organised by the Frankfurt Book Fair in conjunction with the International Association for Research on Textbooks and Educational Media (IARTEM). The principles listed are: Relevance (learner-centredness, appropriateness), Transparency (clarity with respect to aims, achievement, presentation and rationale), Reliability (internal coherence, methodological and factual integrity) Attractiveness, (user-friendliness, interactivity, variety and sensitivity), Flexibility (individualization and adaptability), Generativeness (transferability, integration and cognitive development), Participation (personal interest and partnership) and Socialization (social skills and intercultural awareness). The ideas implicit in these more theoretical categories and sub-categories are explained and discussed by means of a PowerPoint presentation (subsequently made available to the student teachers as a pdf document). Particular emphasis is placed on connecting these ideas with the existing categories of the student teachers' embryonic checklists. This input serves to both bolster the construction of the checklists and provides a useful foundation for their final written evaluation (discussed below).

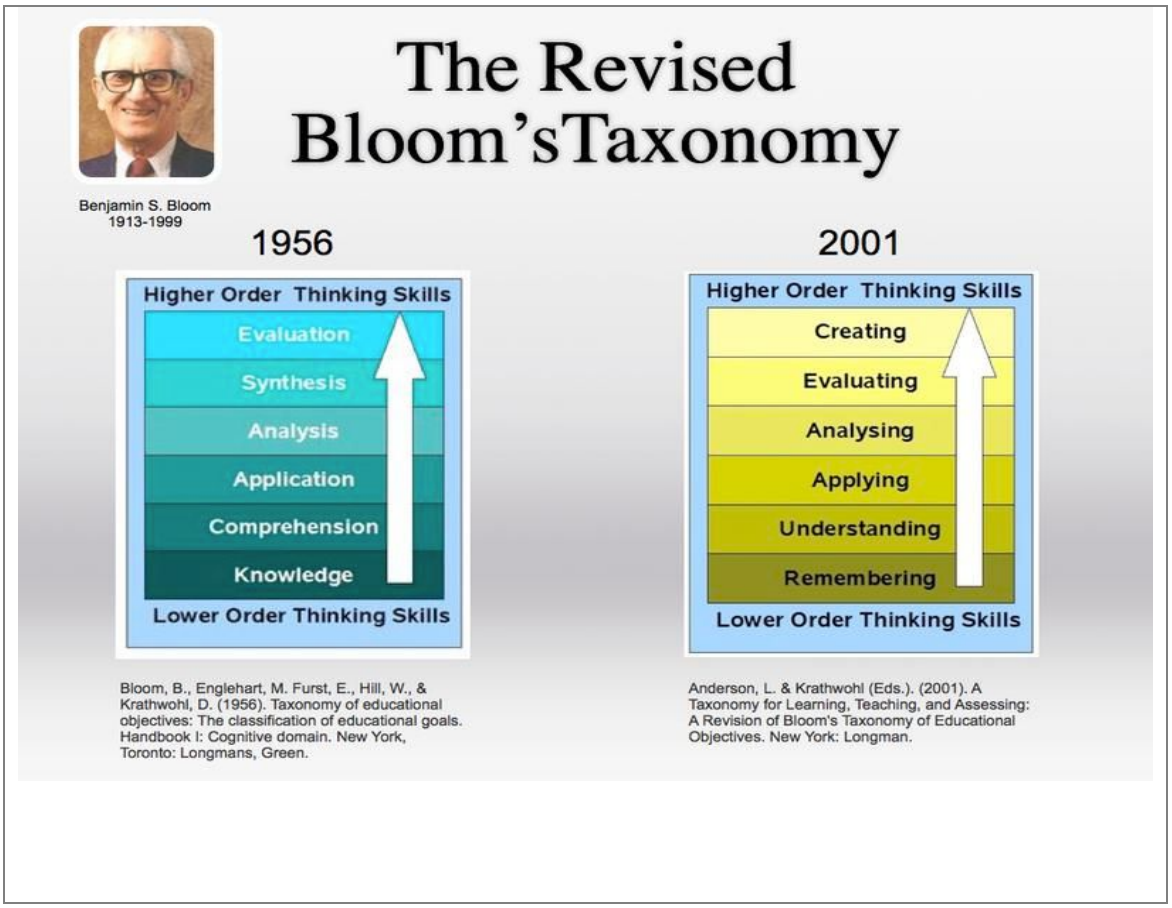
The next step is to get the student teachers to generate more detailed criteria/questions to include in their checklists. Over the space of two or three classes, each category is discussed; the different pairs/groups provide suggestions with the general aim of recognizing perhaps five or six critical elements per category. All their ideas are recorded on the whiteboard and are commented on by the lecturer. Gradually the student teachers collaborate, co-operate and construct their own versions of how the ideas under discussion should be included in their checklists; ultimately these classes result in several different checklists being produced, each of which 'belongs' to a pair/small group of student teachers. These checklists then have to be applied to a real coursebook. An example of a student-generated checklist from 2014/2015 is included at Appendix 1 below. While the checklist included below represents the best example produced by the year group, it is also true to say that it is not 'perfect'; for instance, there is no reference to

the use of educational technologies, perhaps because the existence of this kind of support in Portuguese ELT classrooms is far from uniform.

The application of these checklists occurs in two distinctly different ways. Firstly, the student teachers select a recent, Portuguese-produced ELT coursebook from the 'stock' made available by the lecturer. Interestingly, several chose to apply their checklists to a coursebook that they themselves used at school (or that they recognise from a sibling's use). This represents an important moment in the abrupt shift from being a 'learner' to being a 'teacher'; this change in identity is often hard to achieve among a young, pre-service cohort; relating this need to a challenge/activity to reflect on something concrete, like a coursebook, can be beneficial (Singh and Richards). The results of the checklists having been applied are then compared in a follow-up class with the discussion being guided by a general 'strengths and weaknesses' comparison of different coursebooks in order to provide additional points of reference other than their own checklist and their interpretation of it. (i.e. something student teacher A may see as being positive, may be interpreted differently by student teacher B). This discussion serves as a kind of 'failsafe mechanism' allowing the student teachers to reshape their own knowledge, values and beliefs prior to embarking on the next, evaluated phase.

Secondly, the student teachers are asked to reformulate the results from their checklists and to produce a fully-referenced essay (10-15 pages). Detailed instructions are provided as a kind of 'stylesheet' and student teachers are encouraged to support their analysis through reference to the extensive bibliography which is provided for them online. The PMDI course has its own 'library' of electronic resources (articles, pdf documents, chapters, PowerPoints, etc.) that have been gathered over the years since 2008 and are made available via the FLUP 'intranet' for students enrolled on the course. These reference materials are organised according to categories which usually broadly correspond to the initial categories of the checklists that the student teachers generate. Thus, they are expected to **produce** data since they have to **apply** their own checklists, **reformulate** these data into academic style prose in order to **create** a kind of criteria-based review, to **evaluate** a Portuguese-produced ELT coursebook.

The words in bold in the paragraph above illustrate the philosophy behind the FLUP approach (or our 'PMDI course culture') which is very much based on Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (see Anderson and Krathwohl).



The original taxonomy (Bloom et al.) defined a scheme describing lower and higher order thinking skills, moving from knowledge at the bottom of the continuum to comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and finally evaluation. The Revised Taxonomy provides a concise descriptive charter for the PMDI course. The course, at its outset, is based on the student teachers **remembering** their experiences as learners; it is based on them **understanding** new input: largely in the shape of evaluation 'principles'; it is based on them **ordering** or **organizing** their own and their peers' ideas; it is based on them **creating** frameworks and tools for a critical analysis and it is based on them **re-formatting** and **re-formulating** the data produced into an academic text.

Our overall aim, in line with the major trend of the last 20 years in teacher education, is to help train 'reflective practitioners' (see Richards and Lockhart, or Wallace). In relation to the PMDI course, the Bologna Process was seen as more than just a moment to re-label or re-package some existing course content, rather it was seen as an opportunity to create a classroom context which hosted "a community of learners engaged in social practices and the collaborative construction of meanings" (Richards 164). The course actively involves the student teachers in exploring what they may have assumed ELT materials to be. It puts them in a better position to judge whether there is gap between what and how coursebooks ask them to teach and what and how learners learn. It involves both an individual and collaborative effort on the part of the student teachers; it is both self-initiated and also directed in terms of developing their own 'research' instruments (checklists, in this case); it is essentially dialogic: "there is frequent personal interaction between the teacher educator and the student teachers and among the student teachers themselves" (Korthagen 38). The idea is not to make reflection a requirement of their teaching lives (see Hobbs) but to see the usefulness of criteria-based evaluation of ELT materials, recognizing this context as being likely to be an important part of their future professional duties. These kinds of decisions should be as objective as possible and not undermined by commercial pressure or lack of knowledge: "[t]he important thing is for teachers to consciously choose the ways they use the textbook or other materials, rather than employing them unreflectively" (Guerrattz and Johnston 793).

Early career ELT classroom teachers cannot reasonably be expected to work/teach without coursebooks within the state sector if they have anything approaching a 'full' timetable, spread across various different levels of learning. Teacher education courses, including those at FLUP, should aim to bridge the gap between this in-service reality and the pre-service training that they offer. Propositional knowledge alone, in an 'application-of-the-theory' model, is unlikely to produce effective practitioners. Our courses should be relevant to the real practices of Portuguese schools: we should utilize the pedagogy of "realistic teacher education" (Korthhagen). Our student teachers should be equipped to exercise a critical approach to using ELT materials

based on recognized principles; for example, the S.A.R.S. approach [select, adapt, reject & supplement] as advocated by Graves. In their schools, they should have the opportunity to analyse and discus the use/adoption of coursebooks with their colleagues (and other stakeholders as well perhaps): to foreground the importance of communicative language use, in context, through the medium of skills-based tasks, as being the main stimulus to enable learners to progress (Bruton). FLUP graduates should not simply 'teach the book' in their ELT classrooms based on the assumption that all therein is correct, they should not expect their learners to simply reproduce "textbook content in tests and through classroom questioning" (Brown 659). In sum, successful PMDI students should be willing and able to question and explore different ways of thinking about teaching and that includes different ways of selecting and using (or not) coursebooks.

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APPENDIX 1

A student teacher generated checklist for coursebook evaluation: 2014/15

ELT Coursebook Evaluation Checklist				
			Yes	No
Layout/ Formal aspects	Does the coursebook reflect learners' preferences in terms of layout, design, and organization?			
	Does the coursebook provide a good balance between pictures and texts?			
	Are the visuals in the book used as an integral part of teaching or are they essentially decorative?			
	Does the coursebook's table of content include a clear and detailed overview of the functions and structures that will be taught in each unit?			
	Are the objectives specified explicitly in the table of content?			
	Is there a clear articulation between content and skill development?			
	Is there a balance between grammar and vocabulary?			
	Are the units' topic interesting and appropriate?			
	Are the chapters' transitions theme and difficulty smooth?			
	Are the coursebook units of a manageable length?			
	Is there a sense of progression through time?			
	Is the coursebook easily available?			
	Is the coursebook affordable?			
Language work	Is there a balance between input and output?			
	Input	Does the book encourage deductive or inductive approach to learning – or a balance of both (guided discovery)?		
		Does the coursebook expose students to authentic language?		
		Does the coursebook provide accurate language?		
		Does the coursebook contextualise language through characters and settings to maintain interest?		
		Does the coursebook use authentic listening and reading material?		
		Does the language gradually increase in complexity?		
		Does the input reflect students' needs?		
		Does the coursebook expose students to language at an appropriate level?		
		Is there is a good distribution of vocabulary load across chapters and the whole book?		
		Is the new vocabulary integrated in varying contexts and situations?		
		Is the input recycled in subsequent lessons to reinforce its meaning and use?		

		Is the input extracted from up-to-date and accurate sources?		
		Is there a relationship between the input and real world utility?		
	Output/ activities	Is there enough production or just mechanic practice?		
		Does the coursebook include a variety of activities?		
		Does the coursebook include lead-in activities?		
		Does the coursebook provide students with the opportunity to use the target language in a creative way?		
		Do the activities allow students to recycle previously presented language items?		
		Are the activities challenging and motivating?		
		Is there a match between the language presented and the activities provided by the coursebook?		
		Do the activities allow students to negotiate meaning avoiding a mechanical use of the language?		
		Is there a relationship between output and real world utility?		
		Does the coursebook provide students with the opportunity to choose how they want to practise the target language?		
Skills	Is there a balanced practice in all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)?			
	Writing	Does practice provided develop the consolidation of new items?		
		Does practice allow students to develop creative writing?		
		Is the practice appropriate to students' language level?		
		Does practice allow students to produce different types of texts?		
		Does practice allow students to produce texts with real world utility?		
	Speaking	Does the coursebook include speech situations relevant to students' background?		
		Does the coursebook provide students with a variety of interaction patterns?		
		Are the activities developed to create meaningful communication?		

	Reading	Is there different text types and genres from multiple sources with different subject content?		
		Does the coursebook encourage students to do extensive reading?		
		Are there adequate and appropriate exercises and tasks for improving reading comprehension?		
		Are the reading selections authentic pieces of language?		
	Listening	Is the listening material contextualised by background information, pictures, questions and activities which facilitate comprehension?		
		Is there a variety of listening supports and sources?		
		Is the listening material as authentic as possible, exposing students to a large range of accents and real voices?		
Culture	Is there a relationship between the content of the coursebook and real-life situations (society)?			
	Are the social and cultural contexts in the coursebook comprehensible to the learners?			
	Does the coursebook reflect an accurate depiction of social reality, identity, social groups and relationships (social class, regional identity, ethnic minorities)?			
	Does the coursebook include an accurate depiction of social interaction and language (different levels of formality; as an outsider and an insider)?			
	Does the coursebook provide students with cultural beliefs and behaviour (moral, religious beliefs, daily routines)?			
	Does the coursebook include relevant elements from the national history (historical and contemporary events seen as markers of national identity)?			
	Does the coursebook take account of social and political institutions (state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government)?			
	Does the coursebook provide students with an accurate depiction of national geography (geographical factors seen as being significant by members)?			
	Does the coursebook contain stereotypes and symbols of national identity?			

	Are the topics and texts free from any kind of discrimination (gender, race etc.)?		
Extras	Does the coursebook provide supplementary materials (workbook, Key, glossary, grammar reference section.)?		
	Does the coursebook include self-assessment parts?		
	Does the coursebook have supporting online materials/tests and e-format?		
Practical Considerations	Does the coursebook address different learning styles and strategies?		
	Does the coursebook fit curriculum/goals?		
	Are the objectives specified explicitly in the coursebook?		
	Does the coursebook provide the students with the opportunity for individual study outside the school/ autonomy?		

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Some Lessons Learned: The ReCLes.pt CLIL Project in Higher Education

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Abstract | This paper draws together a number of best practices identified over the course of the national ReCLes.pt CLIL project. Developed by Portuguese Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) associated in the Network Association of Language Centers in Higher Education in Portugal (ReCLes.pt, http://recles.pt), the project promoted pilot teacher training courses in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Ultimately, 33 CLIL course modules were implemented in six participating HEIs, impacting over 600 students. Over the course of three years to reach this initial long-term goal, the ReCLes.pt CLIL researchers collaborated to review the literature and work through the resulting debates. The resulting overarching course of action is reflected in the teaching manual, written collaboratively and published with the related data-gathering tools for the study partially funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology. The best practices focused on in this article include promoting the perspective of FL learners as FL users, the practical implementation of communities of practice and learning, and the development of CLIL modules to include scaffolding and ICT.

Key words | ReCLes.pt, CLIL, Portugal, Higher Education, Best Practices, Scaffolding, ICT

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Beginning in 2012, the Network Association of Language Centers in Higher Education in Portugal (ReCLes.pt, http://recles.pt) formed a focus group to review the literature on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in higher education (also known as ICLHE – Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education). This research aimed to determine the viability of a nation-wide project aimed at the coordinated implementation of local teacher training courses in CLIL which would enable these content teachers to effectively teach their respective courses using English and CLIL methodologies.

As an approach to foreign language (FL) teaching that simultaneously promotes content and FL learning, CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning – was determined to be an appropriate reflection of the context of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The "harmonized" effect of the Bologna Process also draws on teaching missions and the learning experience of the ERASMUS and the current Erasmus+ program. As such, visiting professors and students from any number of countries lecture and learn on Portuguese campuses throughout the academic year in courses that are taught primarily in English.

An extensive needs assessment of academics and administrators at seven Portuguese HEIs confirmed that English, as the most widely-spoken language, is privileged in their internationalization plans both on campus and through EU-funded projects. Given the greater prevalence of English over Portuguese for these plans, HEIs have adopted a dual policy to complement the existing curricular units in Portuguese: (1) courses in Portuguese as a Foreign Language and (2) curricular units in English for incoming Erasmus+ students. In these English-lectured classes, the approach is generally through English as a medium of instruction (EMI), limited to translation without simultaneous support for foreign language learning.

In the interviews with fellow academics and administrators, CLIL was introduced. Since most had never heard of CLIL, the focus of the presentation was on the four Cs – content, cognition, communication, and culture (Coyle, "Theory and Planning for Effective Classrooms" and "CLIL: A Pedagogical Approach"; Coyle, Hood and Marsh) – which reinforced the lifelong

learning qualities of autonomy, plurilingualism, and interculturality promoted in the Bologna Process and in the Europass documents.

Resistance to perceived English-language imperialism was an initial reaction but, when presented as an alternative to the existing reality of EMI on campus, CLIL was seen as an added value in the development of linguistic competences within the applicable HE contexts, given the identified need for sustainable foreign language (FL) training. The combined efforts of this initial research culminated in the acceptance of formal requests for authorization and support in the implementation of 10-hour CLIL teacher training courses in the participating HEIs.

The researchers then rallied to prepare the training courses for these future CLIL teachers and to build the theoretical/practical backbone to support the teacher trainers within this community of learners. Preparation and pilot testing of appropriate CLIL teaching materials and resources throughout 2014 and 2015 led to publication of the *ReCLes.pt CLIL Training Guide: Creating a CLIL Learning Community in Higher Education* (Morgado et al.) with partial funding from the national Foundation for Science and Technology (in Portuguese, the FCT). This training manual includes practical orientation for creating a CLIL teacher training course and each section concludes with suggested activities that focus on strategy development. Original data-gathering tools have also been included that have been tested and specifically designed to monitor and evaluate the various steps in the process. Comparative study of the results documented in these teacher and student questionnaires, observation field notes, self-reports, as well as informal and/or structured interviews have formed the basis of articles detailing the theory and practice of this project (cf. Morgado et al., “CLIL in Portuguese Higher Education”; Arau Ribeiro et al., “”O Projeto CLIL-ReCLes.pt” and “Promoting Dynamic CLIL Courses in Portuguese Higher Education”; Arau Ribeiro; Abreu et al.) and pointed out multiple best practices in this study, based on a resounding response of satisfaction from teachers and students alike. This enthusiastic response crosses the participating HEIs, where the students not only request more CLIL modules but also express the hope that their remaining teachers will receive training to apply the CLIL method in other content areas; the content teachers involved request more CLIL training and more opportunities to develop

CLIL material for their classes with the foreign language teaching specialists (the ReCLes.pt CLIL researchers themselves); these have carried the results forward in articles, reports, posters, conferences, round tables, and meetings with other HEIs in Portugal and Europe. Some participating HEIs have continued to formally offer CLIL teacher training courses while others have focused on iterative applications of the CLIL modules with an expanding base of students, both national and international.

The focus of this article will be on three lessons learned, which can in truth be understood as confirmation of previously known best practice for teaching and learning through (i) promoting the perspective of FL learners as *FL users*; (ii) the practical implementation of communities of practice for both teachers and students, and (iii) the development of CLIL modules to include scaffolding, terminology and ICT. These lessons learned take on special relevance because of their context, within Portuguese higher education, an area still dominated by magisterial-style lectures despite a decade of trying to adapt to the Bologna Process pillars of autonomous learning and student-centered teaching approaches, and with students who are the product of the teacher-centered teaching styles still predominant in Portuguese high schools, where the prescriptive curriculum leaves little room for tailoring the educational plan to the needs of the students.

Promoting the Perspective of FL Learners as *FL Users*

While CLIL, as a teaching and learning approach, is not forcibly dedicated to English, its success depends on a cultural orientation that varies across languages (Chumbo and Morgado), the national project in question worked exclusively in English as a FL given its status as the language of science, where approximately 95% of technical and scientific publications are in English (Science Citation Index, compiled by the Institute for Scientific Information, in Van Weijen) and given that, already in 2004, three-quarters of business interactions used English as a lingua franca or as a mediator between non-native English speakers (Tardy). The widespread use of English means, in part, that those who have this communicative competence will be able to participate more actively in new intercultural experiences with greater self-esteem and self-confidence.

Specifically for Portuguese students, where the country has claimed a B1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages (Eurydice; Holmes) for its high school graduates, higher education has had to shoulder the responsibility for those who have not actually reached this level and continue working with the development of English language competences for those who have been successful.

The essential orientation toward maximum use of the target FL is expressed in the rhetoric, promoted by Cook for L2 users, whereby the students are *FL users* rather than *FL learners*. This levelling term is particularly useful in a CLIL perspective which has a triptych orientation: the teachers of the CLIL teacher training course are FL users, whether native or non-native speakers of English, who are CLIL researchers specialized in FL teaching; the students of the CLIL teacher training course are content teachers who are non-native speakers of English and, thus, FL users as well. In the next phase, these content teachers, enabled with new FL awareness and teaching skills to promote simultaneous content and language learning, work with their own students, also non-native speakers of English who are also FL users, whose CLIL classes are observed and assessed by the initial FL users, the researchers themselves.

In designating that all the participants are FL users (Moore and Dooly qtd. in Morgado and Coelho; Arau Ribeiro), the focus on language use itself was not lost. The L2 user paradigm was fundamental in establishing parity within the teacher training sessions and in classes such that any sense of inferiority based on language competence was banished at the beginning. The relevant material at hand was the process of discovery of how to simultaneously and strategically promote language and content learning. Although the CLIL researchers were the leaders of the community of practice, they participated actively in the detection and identification of difficulties and best practice.

Content teachers, in the 10-hour CLIL teacher training course, were particularly concerned that their own English language competence would not be sufficient. By shifting the spotlight from the perception of “who knows more English” to the practical use of the English language in specific content-related situations, tasks, and problems, the hierarchical pressure for the content teachers

to be better at English than the students was relieved with the suggestion and evidence that both students and teachers were working toward the common goal of getting the work done... in English.

In the initial moments of the CLIL teacher training courses, some of the content teachers even expressed embarrassment at being compared to each other and to their FL teacher. Clearly this affective filter (Krashen), involving decreased motivation, a poor attitude, or low self-confidence, and high anxiety, would have been a barrier if it had not been made apparent early on that, having been selected to participate in the training course, the objective would never be on any perceived language "deficit" but rather on learning and practicing skills to be effective CLIL teachers who could adequately assess their students' needs, prepare appropriate CLIL materials to scaffold learning of the content and of English at the same time, and identify when to ask for assistance in doing so.

In a globalizing context of English in business, health, technology, and the arts, CLIL is characterized by maximizing competences in English and learning objectives that are pluricultural and where the experiences of the FL users are always central. The benefits of this insistence on the FL user include the acceptance of new approaches toward acquiring the FL, toward learning in general and toward self-assessment.

In acquiring FLs, FL users became acquainted with a greater respect for their existing pluricultural and plurilingual competences, which are enhanced by the plurality of their competences in two (or more) languages, from lexical to syntactic awareness and phraseological and musical characteristics of the languages they know. The resulting lift in self-esteem and absolute abolition of the idea of inferiority leveled the playing field, especially in the CLIL teacher training courses. Teachers who tended to describe students as knowing very little were encouraged to value students' multicompetences and their own responsibility for providing appropriately designed learning tasks to reach defined objectives and to solve concrete problems related to the content at hand.

In an Accounting degree, for example, students of all different competence levels worked as FL users to prepare market-ready financial statements of real and fictitious companies. These

students were not limited to taking a test or completing blanks in a workbook but were engaged in using the target language in a meaningful, content-related target task. In this social context, these FL users of all levels flexed their linguistic memory, engaged in spontaneous conversation, and wrote text, demonstrating not only communicative sensitivity but also metapragmatic skills. A Civil Engineering teacher reflected that the simple recognition that both he and the students are FL users regularly directed his attention toward the need to promote concrete and well-defined opportunities to actually use English rather than resort to time-honored lectures. He commented that this new role as a dynamic facilitator contrasted dramatically with his tendency to lecture and was applicable to his other classes in Portuguese as well since it promotes the preparation of student-centered classes. A Computer Science teacher found that considering students as FL users reminded him to scaffold the terminology which, from another perspective, seems so obvious since the area is dominated by English vocabulary; thinking of students as FL users helps teachers to promote a wide variety of situations in which the language will be used to solve problems or deal with tasks in a given area.

By moving beyond the language itself, FL users were able to test hypotheses about the FL and expand their tool kit for communicating strategically, using a range of linguistic, corporal, and facial expressions, cast in a new role as FL users rather than the traditional hierarchically distant professor in higher education. Even the most basic A1 and A2 level FL users could participate and communicate, some for the first time in English, so that not just the class aces but all students were pro-actively involved in the activities.

In terms of overall learning, many teachers and especially students noted the application of new strategies, like subdividing tasks into manageable steps or phases, which helped them avoid the overwhelming fear that comes from perceived failure. The CLIL paradigm is transferrable to other areas because thoughtful scaffolding and support can happen across peers as well as from teacher to student. By establishing more realistic objectives, weaker students were able to participate and self-assess this very participation, for example, in a Database course that simulated a business meeting with the client. Each client question or comment was fielded first

by the students who felt less competent in English, who would then determine whether they dared to respond or preferred to pass it on to the more competent students. The growing confidence as they learned from the scaffolding provided by their peers opened the shared space for collaboration in the discourse and for increased FL use in a practical context.

This productive and desirable approach to collaborative learning and team work contrasts dramatically with the student tendency to cheat themselves of real learning through the use of cheat sheets and copying from each other. Students commented on the increased opportunity to contribute and demonstrate their competences without having to take a test, adjusting and adapting their language use in an interactive environment. They also felt that they could take these new pro-active and interactive roles and apply them in other study areas. Valuing the means as much as the ends, they expressed a real appreciation for questioning and expressing doubts more freely for better understanding and their resulting lowered stress levels in an atmosphere that judged them less.

Finally, in terms of contributing to self-assessment skills, appropriation of the FL user paradigm means that students will value this increasing confidence and, simultaneously, learn to deal positively with their own mistakes. After an initial reluctance, students rapidly became eager to be corrected by their peers and teachers and to try to make effective changes since the newfound awareness of their errors prompts the discovery of strategies for further language use. The certainty that improvement through FL use is indeed possible was affirmed initially by the teachers in their respective CLIL modules and reaffirmed throughout the modules. This belief was noted repeatedly by students as essential for their progress and adoption of a positive attitude since especially students with less language competence had an entrenched sense of vulnerability and negativity related to the use of English. Commitment to ongoing assessment in the classroom was seen as the teachers' confirmation that they too believed that improvement was possible as reflected in the sets of steps created for reaching manageable objectives and using the content material to solve problems and accomplish clearly-defined tasks in cycles that are committed to recycling and reusing new and old concepts and terminology.

Practical Implementation of Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice have been widely discussed and developed by Wenger and subsequently in Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, who have identified this approach to knowing and learning as a shared space to not only show a concern or a passion for something people do but also to learn how to do it better through regular interaction. Through this definition, a community of practice necessarily will reinforce the relevance of material that is somehow approachable based on prior knowledge and the significance of this material both now and for the future.

In the ReCLes.pt CLIL project, communities of practice were strategically developed and nurtured in at least four different moments or configurations, similar to the logo of the national association in Figure 1. Parallels among the communities of practice follow the principles defined for regular interaction within a shared space for progressive and collaborative learning. Differences among these communities of practice were based on the number of participants, as will be more specifically defined. As depicted in Figure 2 (below), starting initially at the top right and moving clockwise, the different communities of practice were initially created and developed sequentially but, even after the third year of the project, they are all still active and interactive within and amongst the four communities at each HEI.

Figure 1. *Logo of ReCLes.pt*

The initial community of practice, exclusive to the up to 15 ReCLes.pt CLIL researchers themselves, was composed of English language and culture professors in higher education, and, consequently, foreign language teaching specialists, as well as IT specialists. The uniting material was the debate and discussion to establish the guidelines of the long-term project, review the literature, and develop the viable proposals on language policy and practice and the flexibility necessary in local contexts. Other concerns that required ongoing practice in the community aimed at the development of a common thread for designing the teaching material to include in the training manual, and the related data-gathering tools, ranging from interview matrixes to questionnaires and observation notes. The configurations had to be discussed openly to determine

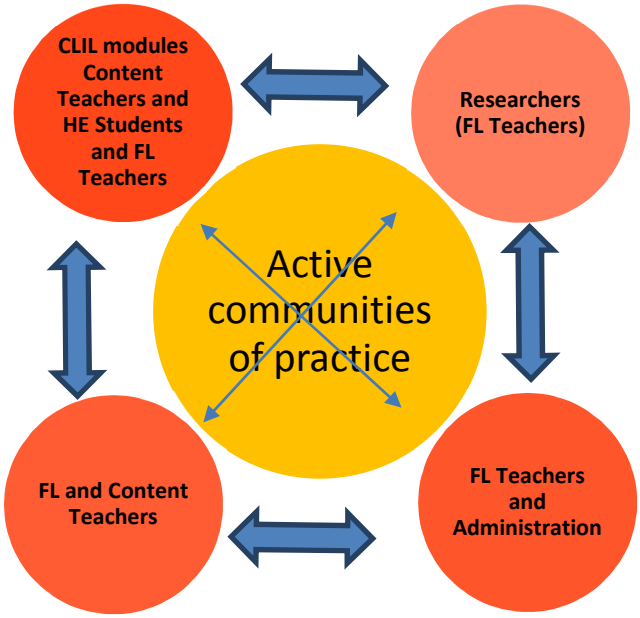

Figure 2. *ReCLes.pt CLIL Communities of Practice in Higher Education*

their relative impact at a local level and eventual constraints on the study. Research strengths and experience, for example, in other European projects and in specific areas such as terminology and scaffolding, were maximized. On the other hand, weaknesses such as less experience in a given technological area were minimized by working collaboratively and sharing knowledge. Serious commitment to the community of practice was tested in the collaborative writing for the training manual in order to maintain a similar style and tone across this extensive publication. The researchers relied greatly on open-mindedness and accepting and offering constructive criticism in regular face-to-face and online contact. A database was also created for suggesting new and existing materials.

During the initial months of interviews with fellow academics and with the local administration at the participating HEIs, where a common objective/material was under discussion, ongoing interaction focused on the concern and passion for promoting successful plans for language policy and internationalization. While the researchers were assessing and recording the

priorities and objectives at their respective schools, they were also offering the ReCLes.pt CLIL project as a viable solution that required a dynamic and shared space for discussion. The virtual "space" morphed from office to encounters at the bar and in the hallways amongst the various specific representatives of the administration (Offices of Mobility, Presidents, Vice Presidents, Deans, content teachers and other FL teachers). The discussion and debate promoted by the FL teachers, traditionally seen as responsible for those soft skills of communication at the language centers, was deemed both timely and relevant and the proposed solutions worthy of in-depth discussion. While these communities of practice were first being prepared, relationships were established and nurtured so that the experienced voice of the researchers/FL teachers could participate in this new perspective on the debate about sustainability in the international market for higher education. The consensus is that the ongoing contact, communication, and constructive criticism has contributed to the overall success of the project.

Still another community of practice received the most attention throughout the project: the CLIL teacher training course. The ten contact hours were distributed over four to six sessions, involving the CLIL researchers/FL teachers and their local colleagues who are content teachers. Since the initiative was supported and promoted by the administration, it was necessarily more visible to the general teaching staff and administrators. Students as well read the strategically posted announcements online and on notice boards and, as a result, were eager to benefit from this nationwide project. Some content teachers were either invited to participate based on previous knowledge of their interest and language competence level or on the fact that they need to teach courses explicitly designed for incoming Erasmus+ students; others, who had been selected by the administrators, applied to participate and were selected through a comprehensive diagnostic test to ascertain their English language level as B2. Regardless of the path, all participants in the CLIL teacher training courses – FL and content teachers alike, numbering between four and ten on each campus – were highly motivated and took time out from their demanding schedules to become active members of this community of practice.

The final communities of practice to be highlighted are those created by the content teachers for the CLIL module with their own students, ranging in number from 15 to 30. These were the most unexpected within the context of the traditional hierarchical divide between teachers and students, prevalent in Portugal, but in line with expectations created throughout the ReCLes.pt CLIL project. Teachers actually practiced and subsequently planned for a wide variety of class activities in line with communities of practice. As promoted by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, activities like those adapted in the figure below were prominent in the 33 CLIL modules implemented throughout the country.

Documentation projects "How many times have we already faced this issue or problem? Let's at last write it down."	**Problem-solving** "Let's work together and brainstorm some ideas."	**Discussing developments** "What do you think of the latest system? How does it compare to the previous system?"
Reusing assets "Didn't we do a project like this for another class last semester? We could easily tweak it for this assignment."	**Virtual visits** "We are interested in visiting your program/office/lab. Perhaps we can adopt some of your procedures."	**Mapping knowledge** "Can you find what is missing? Did you identify WHO knows WHAT? What other areas would be good contacts?
Coordination and synergy "Let's work together to reach a better more efficient solution?"	**Requests for info** "Where can I find …?"	**Seeking experience** "Has anyone dealt with a simulated/real situation like this?"

Figure 3. *Suggested contextualization for activities in a community of practice*

Because of the L2 user paradigm, students in these communities of practice favored relevant and stimulating activities that required the cognitive manipulation of material and FL use in communicative activities, acquiring competences in new areas and practicing proficiency in English.

These communities of practice were also more noticeable because they were closely monitored and observed by the ReCLes.pt CLIL researchers, who continue now to meet with the content teachers in an ongoing effort to maintain practice and learning through this approach.

The Development of CLIL Modules to Include Scaffolding and ICT

The material designed for the CLIL modules covered support and scaffolding through the introduction to new concepts based on prior knowledge, meaningful activities, and terminology-based recourse to Web 2.0 tools. The activities conceived and prepared for these innovative CLIL classes had to adequately scaffold the content in a variety of contexts, including a variety of types of activities, such as modeling, bridging, contextualizing, schema building, and re-presenting text. Successful scaffolding in these contexts would be dependent on consistently building on existing student knowledge. It was especially important to initially assess not only student skills but also their attitudes, interests and experience.

Then, based on this awareness of their students' needs, teachers could repackage information and competences in user-friendly ways. Another strategy in preparation was to redistribute these packages into manageable and logical chunks. Teachers who learned of the existence of different learning styles were better able to diversify their material in response. Other aspects introduced were the importance of fostering creative and critical thinking and challenging students to take yet another step forward rather than remain in their comfort zone. The development of metacognition would allow students to learn how to assess themselves and how to build learning skills and strategies like planning and monitoring.

Although initially regarded as time-consuming and wasteful, scaffolding activities came to be seen as fundamental. A primary use was to subdivide learning objectives into manageable tasks that would contribute to learning of the overall content. Respectful ongoing discussion and debate among peers, bolstered by the community of practice orientation, removed the menace from information and communication technology (ICT), even for some teachers who had successfully eschewed Web 2.0 tools until then. Teachers were introduced to terminology-based

tools, like TermoStat Web 3.0 and TerMine; their students then benefited from extracting and identifying terms, defining these terms and mapping the relations amongst them. The possibility of organizing appropriate discourse and representing their knowledge visually through these and other tools will necessarily be the focus of another article but, overall, the visual orientation of these tools is particularly important for digital natives. Students of this generation readily manipulate ICT and do not hesitate to share their results via Web 2.0.

The central goal of intense, purposeful interaction with the material to be learned led the communities of practice toward the next step: assisted materials design for implementing the CLIL module in each teacher's content area. The mutual respect established amongst the teachers involved in the project assured that any content teacher that felt they needed help at any time during the process of planning and material design would ask, unrestricted by affective concerns. The activities they effectively designed aimed at not only acquisition of competences in the content area but also, simultaneously, at language competence. Moreover, the variety of types of activities designed promoted eventual autonomy so that students would learn about the management of their own competences and manipulation of these competences for effective and intercultural communication.

Conclusions

Notwithstanding local issues such as class size and the selection of CLIL courses to be offered, monitoring of the implementation of both CLIL teaching and learning and consideration of the results of this evaluation has been an important cornerstone to the careful crafting of the ongoing ReCLes.pt CLIL project. Mandatory monitoring reports are available to all participating schools and templates for data gathering are available online (Morgado et al., *ReCLes.pt CLIL Training Guide*). The results have added fire to the collaboration, debate and constructive criticism amongst the teacher trainers and the CLIL communities of practice and learning, within the specific context of each HEI, to determine the most successful approaches to promoting student-centered interactive teaching methodologies. The transferability of best practices from one course to

another and amongst the participating schools has been supported by the clear description of specific objectives and competences to be acquired so that the lessons learned are many. While this article has focused on the L2 user orientation, communities of practice, and the assisted development of CLIL modules that simultaneously integrate scaffolding and Web 2.0 tools, other potential lessons learned are still under assessment, such as the application of terminology-based tools, the validity of a minimum level of English language competence to work with CLIL, and the role of Portuguese when CLIL is the guiding methodology.

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Foreign Language Teaching in a Sexed Classroom

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Abstract | Recent scientific studies have demonstrated the clear existence of brain sexual dimorphism, with distinct structural, chemical, genetic, hormonal and functional differences between the two sexes. In spite of the complexity of this theme and even though science acknowledges that many questions are still not answered, it is a fact today that the brain is a sexed organ. The differences between girls and boys regarding cognitive and emotional processing naturally have consequences in teaching-learning situations. Nevertheless, most teachers are not aware of these differences and their effects. Each group of students is not a selection of androgynous individuals, therefore differentiated strategies according to sex are an optimisation tool in teaching-learning situations, both in single-sex and co-ed contexts.

Key words | sexual dimorphism, differentiated education according to sex, verbal and spatial skills, cognitive and emotional processing, response to stress, foreign language teaching

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In the1970s it was argued that sexual identity was culture rather than nature-based, that is, people weren't born male or female. Instead they became male or female due to social and educational exposure. This belief had and still has a huge impact on teachers' supposedly neutral approaches to their learners, even though neutral teaching does not exist. In this short article it will be demonstrated that optimal teaching-learning situations take students' sex into account and, by being recognised, differences are reduced and weaknesses become strengths. All strategies presented will be applied to foreign language teaching-learning situations.

Scientific breakthroughs in neuroscience (mainly the PET scan and the MRI) have enabled the study of the human brain in action, showing clear structural and functional differences between the sexes. Men and women, girls and boys are able to perform the same tasks and to reach the same goals but they do this by using different neurological circuits. Furthermore, recent research has found several of the same distinctive behavioural traits in other species (mainly non-human primates), which invalidates cultural explanations of behaviour. Moreover, how can we explain systematic differences between the two sexes in different cultures around the world? Even though many of these questions are not fully answered, there seems to be enough scientific evidence to state that men and women, girls and boys tend to see and hear the world differently. They tend to process information differently and they tend to respond to stress differently. Unsurprisingly this has a huge impact on education. Teachers must be aware that their choices within the classroom and their personal performance as teachers are differently interpreted by their students according to their sex. In order to include this variable in optimal teaching-learning situations, we must start by analysing what science has recently told us about sexual dimorphism and the distinct structural, chemical, genetic, hormonal and functional differences between the two sexes.

One of the main neurological differences is the lateralization of functions between the two hemispheres, which is much more obvious in male subjects. In brain damage episodes females tend to be able to recover the functions of the affected area as they manage to activate different regions of the brain for the same function. It has also been demonstrated that the corpus callosum (the area connecting the two cerebral hemispheres) tends to be denser and have more neural

connections in females, which explains their natural skills in multitasking as opposed to the male functional lateralization and brain compartmentalization. In spite of this, brain scanning has also demonstrated that the female brain tends to be more active than the male brain regarding the left hemisphere, particularly in the regions dedicated to verbal skills (Broca's area and Wernicke's area). On the other hand, there are also areas that tend to be larger or more active in the male brain, such has the cerebellum, which is related to sensory perception, coordination and motor skills. Furthermore there are key differences in the limbic system, especially in the amygdala and the hippocampus. The first tends to be larger in males, a fact that has been used to explain male aggressiveness, and the second, which converts information from working memory into long-term or permanent memory, tends to be larger and having higher number and speed of neuron transmissions in females. This seems to explain the female ability to recall more information, even though there are other specific differences between the sexes, regarding memory. For instance, girls tend to remember easily something they have heard, while boys will probably remember something they have seen or done. The limbic system is also related to emotional processing and again important differences have been described.

> Within this system [the limbic system], men's brains glowed most brightly in a region linked to a quick physical response. Women's didn't; their limbic system was more active in another region, linked to a quick verbal response. (Blum 61)

Besides the structural differences, there are also distinctive rates of brain maturation. We now know that the idea that boys' neurological development is just slower than girls' is wrong.

> Researchers at Virginia Tech examined brain activity in 508 normal children – 224 girls and 284 boys – ranging in age from two months to sixteen years. This study, the largest and most carefully executed of its type, demonstrated that various regions of the brain develop in a different sequence in girls compared with boys. It's not correct to say, "Boys develop along the same lines as girls, only slower." The truth is more nuanced. These researchers found that while the areas of the brain involved in

> language and fine motor skills mature about six years earlier in girls than in boys, the areas of the brain involved in targeting and spatial memory mature about four years earlier in boys than in girls. These researchers concluded that the areas of the brain involved in language, in spatial memory, in motor coordination, and in getting along with other people develop in a "different order, time, and rate" in girls compared with boys. (Sax, Leonard 93)

To sum up, research has demonstrated what most teachers have experienced in their classrooms. In their school years, girls tend to be better at subjects or tasks that require verbal skills and boys tend to be better at subjects or tasks that involve spatial skills. Unsurprisingly, in university degrees, language arts courses tend to be female dominated and STEM courses tend to be male dominated. This just shows us how deeply we have failed. By not recognising sex differences in early years, teachers not only are not able to reduce them but also unconsciously reinforce them. In 2009, researchers from UCLA examined data from more than 20,000 young women across the United States (Sax, Linda. *Women Graduates of Single-Sex and Coeducational High Schools: Differences in their Characteristics and the Transition to College*) and they found that girls who graduated from single-sex schools had higher SAT scores and higher academic self-confidence, particularly in STEM areas, than girls who graduated from co-ed schools. That is, girls coming from a single-sex environment are doing better in male-dominated areas. There are two explanations for this. On one hand, all single-sex contexts are naturally stereotype-free. In a female class the best student kicking a ball or building a robot is a girl. Girls are not intimidated by boys' better spatial skills because boys aren't there and therefore they are confident in pursuing their dreams of being an astrophysicist or a mechanical engineer. The same is true for boys. In a male class the best student writing a love poem or pulling a wheel-chair is a boy. In a stereotype-free context boys are not ashamed of developing the traditionally feminine skills and they are able to choose being brilliant kindergarten teachers or dedicated nurses. Besides this, there is another explanation that we must take into account. By being aware of the sex differences, most single-sex schools are developing teaching-learning strategies to cope with each

specific situation, and this is something that should be done in both single-sex and co-ed classrooms.

Before we move on to specific sex-based strategies in foreign language teaching-learning situations, and in order for them to be clear, we must add to the structural brain differences described above other types of distinctive aspects, such as hormones. Hormonal variation throughout the menstrual cycle has a natural impact on females' performance. In mental rotation of three-dimensional objects men always score above women. Nonetheless, women's performance varies along their menstrual cycle. When their hormonal levels are at the lowest point, female and male performance are almost the same. But when oestrogen goes up at the end of the cycle, women's score is worse and they simultaneously improve their performance in verbal tests. Male dominance in mathematical and spatial tasks seems also to be related to men's levels of testosterone. In lab experiments, male rats are better than female rats in maze tests. Nonetheless when the females are injected with this hormone their performance is the same. For ethical reasons this cannot be tested in humans, but we do know that human males who are testosterone-blocked tend to have much lower math and spatial scores. Another important difference is the role of oxytocin, which is much more functionally present in females than males. This hormone is related to bonding, emotional connections and empathy. It is likely to be one of the main causes of the female need to please others and to maintain relationships.

Unsurprisingly all structural and hormonal differences have functional consequences. As we have said, females tend to have better verbal skills and males tend to have better spatial skills. Therefore, in navigation tasks, boys and men outperform girls and women when the task is framed in Euclidean terms (north, south, east, west). On the other hand, females outperform males when the task is based in landmarks.

> A study published in 2003 demonstrated that this gender difference in navigation is well established by five years of age. Those different strategies correlate with different brain regions. Neuroscientists have found that young women and young men use different areas in the brain when they navigate: young women use the cerebral cortex while young men use the hippocampus . . . (Sax, Leonard 26)

There are also functional differences regarding seeing and hearing. Researchers at Cambridge University videotaped 102 babies on the day they were born. They gave these children the choice of looking at a young woman's face or a dangling mobile. In both cases there was no sound associated and the researcher didn't know the babies' sex. By analysing eye motions it became clear that boy babies were more interested in the mobile and girl babies in the human face and that probably has to do with sex differences in the anatomy of the eye. The male retina is thicker and has predominantly M cells, which compile information about movement and direction, while the female retina is thinner and has predominantly P cells, which compile information about colour and texture.

Furthermore, M cells are prewired to be most sensitive to cold colours, so boys and men tend to choose blue, black, grey or silver. And P cells are most sensitive to warm colours, so girls and women will probably prefer red, orange or pink.

There are also significant differences in hearing. Research has shown that, especially in the 1000 to 4000 Hz range (critical for speech discrimination), female hearing is substantially more sensitive, which has naturally great impact in teaching-learning situations. Many healthy boys are wrongly diagnosed with ADHD just because they cannot properly hear their primary teacher, who is usually a woman, speaking in a too soft voice. The opposite also happens and many girls interpret loud voices as being aggressive.

> I can't count the number of times a father has told me, "My daughter says I yell at her. I've never yelled at her. I just speak to her in a normal tone of voice, and she says I'm yelling." If a forty-three-year-old man speaks in what he thinks is a "normal tone of voice" to a seventeen-year-old girl, that girl is going to experience his voice as being about ten times louder than what the man is hearing. He *is* yelling at her, but he doesn't realize it. The father and his daughter are experiencing the same sound in two different ways. (Sax, Leonard 18)

Emotional processing is also different and again this has a great impact in teaching-learning situations. In females, brain maturation moves emotional processing up to the cerebral cortex, an

area associated with higher cognitive functions, such as language, reasoning and reflection. In males this type of processing stays in the amygdala. This female neurological connection between emotion and language seems to explain the differences between the sexes regarding emotional literacy.

> Both females and males must be equally understood and protected emotionally. . . . Males are simply not as tough as we think; often females are emotionally tougher (though it doesn't appear so when they overtly show distress in tears and in talk more than do boys).
>
> Simultaneously, we have all intuited how girls often take things personally; this is a way in which they are fragile. Girls process more emotive information than boys; whereas male emotional fragility comes from having fewer cortical areas available to process emotional information, girls' emotional fragility often comes from having so many emotive functions that they become overwhelmed by the emotional input. (Gurian 31-32)

This is tightly linked to other behavioural aspects, such as risk-taking and responding to stress. We now know that significant differences in the autonomic nervous system clearly influence male and female response to pressure. For boys and men the sympathetic nervous system tends to be dominant and the production of adrenaline is associated to the thrill that drives them to act. On the other hand, in response to stress, the female autonomic nervous system is mainly dominated by the parasympathetic nervous system and, instead of adrenaline, acetylcholine is produced, causing nausea and no drive to action at all. Due to these findings the description of human response to stress has been recently rewritten. A group of researchers from the University of California has demonstrated that the "fight-or-flight" pattern does not apply to females

> We propose a theory of female responses to stress characterized by a pattern termed "tend-and-befriend." Specifically, we propose that women's responses to stress are characterized by patterns that involve caring for offspring under stressful circumstances, joining social groups to reduce vulnerability, and contributing to the development of social groupings, especially those involving female networks, for the exchange of resources and responsibilities. We maintain that aspects of these responses, both

> maternal and affiliative, may have built on the biobehavioral attachment – caregiving system that depends, in part, on oxytocin, estrogen, and endogenous opioid mechanisms, among other neuroendocrine underpinnings. . . . We propose this theory as a biobehavioral alternative to the fight-or-flight response (Canon, 1932), which has dominated stress research of the past 5 decades and has been disproportionately based on studies of males. (Taylor et al. 421-2)

These differences in responding to stress are tightly linked to differences in risk-taking, as males tend to overestimate their abilities and risk more and females tend to underestimate their abilities and risk less. Again we cannot attribute this to culture only due to the fact that the same tendency is described in other species.

> These differences appear to be inborn. It's hard to claim that male monkeys overestimate their abilities because they've been watching too many James Bond films. We have to consider the possibility that the tendency for male primates (including humans) to do insanely dangerous things may be innate rather than culturally programmed. (Sax, Leonard 45)

The female tendency to underestimate their own abilities and simultaneously risk less is one of the causes of sex discrimination today. Many women are not able to risk as much as men in a job interview and in the end they don't earn as much for the same job. What are we doing about this as teachers of girls? What are we doing when we plan an ELT speaking activity and we get excellent feedback from most boys, who are probably more confident regarding public exposure, and shy contributes from many girls, for whom speaking in class is perceived as risk taking? Several experts in sex differences underline that many well-intentioned teachers are just reinforcing learned helplessness in girls. Learned helplessness is a concept proposed by Martin Seligman to describe what he observed in animals and humans repeatedly subjected to negative stimuli they could not escape from. These subjects stopped trying to avoid the stimuli and even when they were offered an opportunity to escape, learned helplessness prevented any kind of initiative. Girls who repeatedly watch boys succeeding in risk-taking activities or in reaching the

target faster (just because males are prewired to do so) are learning helplessness and the more they learn it the less they will try to fight it.

Another important aspect that conditions female performance (and has a great impact in the classroom) is the need to please others and be accepted.

> Educational researchers have consistently found that girls are more concerned than boys are with pleasing the teacher and more likely than boys to follow the teacher's example. Remarkably, a similar finding has recently been described in our closest genetic relative, the chimpanzee. . . . Girl chimps follow their teacher's example . . . while boy chimps completely disregard the teacher, preferring to do it their own way . . . . The boy chimps are consequently much slower to master the task than the girls are. (Sax, Leonard 80-1)

In spite of its advantages, this female characteristic is also quite dangerous, especially when it comes to emotional processing. Eva Pomerantz and her team (2002) have explained how girls are negatively affected by their need to please others, particularly parents and teachers. This need is followed by the fear of failure and girls tend to have higher levels of stress and anxiety, not only in unsuccessful situations but also when their academic performance is positive.

> Notably, although girls were the most vulnerable to internal distress when they were doing poorly in school, even girls who were doing well were more vulnerable than were boys. It is quite possible that the gender difference in concern with pleasing adults and in how achievement situations are approached may also account for this finding in that they cause even the potential of failure to be more distressing to girls than to boys. (Pomerantz, Altermatt and Saxon 402)

After describing the most significant differences between the two sexes, it becomes clear how they may condition teaching-learning situations. As teachers, we may choose to ignore them or we may choose to acknowledge them and to bear them in mind when we design a lesson plan for a specific group of students. In the following section I will describe strategies and activities I've found successful in my interaction with boys and girls, both in co-ed and single-sex contexts.

As stated above, girls' left hemispheres tend to mature earlier and to be more active, especially in areas connected to verbal skills. For this reason, most female schools are mainly worried about mathematical and spatial skills and they prioritize stimuli in these areas, by promoting chess, archery, navigation, problem solving, etc. Nonetheless, in language teaching situations there is a lot to do. English teachers of girls should bear in mind that, in order to improve fragile areas in learning, they can take advantage of the female characteristics in processing input. Considering the role of oxytocin, one of the best ways of engaging girls in an activity they may find a bit more difficult is by introducing emotional connections to the content. We manage to do this by including real stories (or they own personal stories), by inviting real people to the classroom, by encouraging them to write to or speak with real people outside the classroom. Besides taking advantage of this, teachers should also keep in mind the areas in which girls are fragile. As we have seen, females tend to underestimate their skills and consequently risk less. In ELT situations this is particularly obvious in speaking activities, in which boys tend to easily outperform girls just because they are much more confident and relaxed. Bearing in mind the female tendency to "tend-and-befriend" in response to stress, we should consider speaking activities in small groups and we may allow our students to choose their own group. It is quite possible that they choose a single-sex group. Due to the female tendency in response to stress mentioned above, most cooperative learning techniques tend to work well with girls. In this context, a successful strategy is "Think-Pair-Share" or "Think-Pair-Square-Share", which can be adapted particularly to speaking activities. It aims at encouraging individual participation by allowing students time to think through questions, using three (or four) different steps. Furthermore (even though it was not designed for girls only) it takes advantage of the female pattern "tend-and-befriend" as it directs a potentially stressful situation (public exposure) to a comfort zone (small and friendly group of people). Nonetheless, the goal is not to protect girls from all situations they may perceive as too risky. On the contrary, we need to give them the right tools to gradually become more self-confident and spontaneous. This specific strategy aims precisely at introducing tension gradually. Girls are given time to think and structure their thought (step 1), then they are

offered one or two steps of practice in a small group (steps 2 and 3 – pair and square) before they have to face the whole group (step 4 – share), speaking in public.

As we've seen, the male brain works differently. Boys and men process the world differently and respond to stress differently. Again, if we are aware of the existence of fragile areas, we can potentiate better teaching-learning situations by taking advantage of strong areas. In this context, in ELT we must remember that the male brain tends to be more active in areas linked to spatial skills. For this reason, many experts are encouraging parents and teachers to promote the development of verbal skills in boys from the moment they are born. But what can we do as teachers of boys, besides developing verbal skills, as that is what we do anyway? Introducing movement in traditionally static activities is usually quite successful. Teachers may simply allow boys to work standing, and by doing so, disruptive behaviour decreases and boys tend to be more engaged. A variation of this technique is to ask boys to stand whenever they finish an activity. This way, teachers are able to both monitor their students' work and include movement. There are also activities in which movement is part of the activity itself, such "stations". This activity can be adapted that all language skills. When it comes to boys, it is particularly interesting to adapt "stations" to reading and writing. Students are asked to move around the classroom, performing a specific task in each station. For instance, in the first station they may be offered a text to read and in the following stations several steps of exercises on that text. This can be associate to a specific type of targeting, such as ringing a bell or throwing a ball into a basket. Balls are actually a powerful tool for boys. Passing a ball around while you revise the past of irregular verbs or a vocabulary theme is an efficient way of keeping boys engaged. Furthermore, teachers must also bear in mind that boys tend to respond to stress in a positive way, so taking advantage of adrenaline and the thrill that drives to action is usually a powerful tool. In this context, it's useful to introduce pressure, for instance, by setting time limits or promoting competitions and contests.

There are no limits in what girls and boys are able to do and achieve. Nonetheless if we want them both to have equal opportunities in the future, we must acknowledge their differences

in order to cope with them. Offering the same thing to different people is egalitarian but it is not fair. Accepting sex as a variable in the classroom (even with its own internal variations, as happens with age) is moving from equality to equity in education. There is still a lot of work to be done in this field. Teachers are being challenged to learn about what neuroscience is investigating on sex differences in processing information and to cross-reference this with the specific didactics of the subject they teach. It is indeed a great challenge, which implies hard work and a high dose of creativity. Motivation to proceed will come from the classroom, as teachers will see happier and more engaged students every day.

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Humour in Peer Interaction in the L2 Classroom

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Abstract | Research in the study of affect in L2 learning acknowledges that attention to the social dimension can 'improve language teaching and learning' and that negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, stress, anger or depression may compromise our learning potential, whereas positive emotions such as self-esteem and empathy can ease the language learning process (Arnold and Brown 1). For the majority of learners, the classroom environment should be a place which encourages interaction and minimises negative emotions such as anxiety, which could interfere with such interaction. This study seeks to describe episodes of humour during peer oral interaction which may help generate a positive social dimension amongst learners.

Key words | humour, peer interaction, social setting, affective states, Conversation analysis, Task Based Learning

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Second Language Acquisition research suggests that second languages are acquired when the language learner processes language input in interactional situations, and it is through this interaction, which Allwright (156) considers to be '*the* fundamental fact of classroom pedagogy,' that the learner's interlanguage system[1] gradually develops. Task Based Learning (TBL) can be thought of as a recent version of a communicative methodology based on current theories of second language acquisition which has drawn extensively on the work of SLA researchers such as Crookes and Gass; Ellis; Garcia Mayo; and Samuda and Bygate. In the TBL classroom peers interact in pairs and small groups to complete oral tasks, the primary focus of which is meaning rather than language. Peer interaction has been described as having a 'collaborative, multiparty, symmetrical participation structure' (Blum-Kulka and Snow), collaborative, as participants work together towards a common goal, multiparty, as two or more participants are involved, and symmetrical in contrast to the hierarchical relationship between learners and teachers. Traditionally peer interaction was not considered a context for learning but a belief that learner talking time could be greatly increased if learners talked to each other, and the notion that this interaction would allow peers to adopt new conversational roles has led to a greater reliance on peer interaction as a context for language practice and use (Philip, Adams, and Iwashita 2).

Although most would agree that oral interaction in the language classroom is necessary for language learning to take place, it is also true that it can be a threatening environment for some learners. If we consider the potential face threatening nature of the language classroom, where individuals who may be highly eloquent in their first language can struggle to express themselves in the target language, it is unsurprising that classroom language learning can provoke negative emotions in some learners. However, our emotional state is important for our capacity to learn. When we consider the effect of emotions on L1, it has been shown that negative emotions such as anxiety, due to the sustained cognitive workload it involves, can adversely affect 'speech planning and execution' whereas more positive emotions such as contentment may 'improve speech fluency through the minimizing of extraneous, distracting thoughts' (Johnstone and

Scherer 222). Krashen (qtd. in Richards and Rodgers 183) recognised the importance of the learner's emotional state in L2 language learning in his 'Affective Filter Hypothesis'. Here, he proposed that a high affective filter (e.g. fear or embarrassment) would hinder or block the necessary input for acquisition, whereas learners with a low affective filter would interact more confidently and would seek out and be more receptive to this input, leading to more exposure to input. Research in the study of affect in L2 learning acknowledges that attention to affect can 'improve language teaching and learning' and that negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, stress, anger or depression may compromise our learning potential, whereas positive emotions such as self-esteem and empathy can ease the language learning process (Arnold and Brown 1).

One way to create a positive social dimension amongst peers is through the use of humour. Oxford (76) suggests using laughter to relax students and reduce anxiety and Ziv suggests that one of the social functions of laughter is that of oiling the wheels of interpersonal communication and relationships, lessening group tension, making the group more attractive to its members and strengthening ties between them. Duff (120) suggests that humour can be used in the language classroom to increase students' enjoyment of the activities, undermine the seriousness of classroom interaction and create greater rapport between learners. In addition, Martineau (qtd. in Senior 179) suggests that:

> The function of humor is to initiate and facilitate communication and development of social relationships. Through humor, consensus is achieved and social distance is reduced. As an aspect of the socio-emotional role in informal groups, humor serves as a symbol of social approval promoting group solidarity.

The research described here analyses episodes when peers engage in humour during peer to peer oral interaction in the TBL classroom. The learners involved were adult learners at B1 level (Council for Cultural Co-operation European Committee 2001) who attended three hour weekly classes in groups of up to eighteen learners, all of whom were eighteen years of age or over. Recordings of students taking part in oral tasks were carried out in normal class time after the class teacher had explained the activity and distributed task sheets. Groups of between 2 and 4

students were chosen randomly and recorded simultaneously and in the same room for the duration of the task, which on average lasted approximately 15 minutes, using two voice recorders which were placed on the table in front of the students. All names have been changed. During the task itself the class teacher circulated helping students when necessary and answering learners' questions, as usual. These interactions were then transcribed and certain sections re-transcribed and analysed using conventions from Conversation Analysis (CA). CA is a methodology which tries to explain the details of interaction and to 'uncover the communicative and social competences that structure and render meaningful talk-in-interaction' (Firth and Wagner 813). It is a multi-disciplinary methodology and has been applied to a wide range of academic areas, including language learning and teaching. The transcription conventions used can be seen in Appendix 1.

Qualitative Analysis of Peer Interaction

In Excerpt 1, Filomena, Bernardo and Lourenço are completing a dictogloss activity (Appendix 2). Line numbers shown are those from the original transcription and arrows indicate lines under discussion. This excerpt shows that when the group finishes the activity before their classmates, they continue to speak in English and exchange real world information about the Aztecs and football. On line 52 the triad finish the activity and this is followed by a 7 second pause. On line 53 Filomena extends the task by asking about a doubt she has and a short exchange between Filomena and Bernardo then ensues. On line 61 however this exchange finishes, as the interactants have completed the task. Then on line 62 Lourenço takes on the role as information giver and extends the task by initiating a conversation about the Aztecs.

(1)

	49	L	tv was invented
	50	B	(2) in 1925
	51	F	by a scotch? (3) in 1925
→	52	B	(1) °°in 1925°°
	53	F	(7) i'm i'm [doubtful] about what here. (3) i was astonished to

	54		learn
	55	B	i think it's that
	56	F	that
	57	B	that football
	58	F	yes (.) I guess (.) also (.) that football?
	59	B	was [pla:yed]
	60	F	ºwas played by aztecs (.) yeahº
	61	B	ºyes º
→	62	L	ºwith an iron ballº (2) it was an iron ball or a rock ball (1) [and
	63		they crack]
	64	B	[an iron?]
	65	L	ºyeah (1) they crack the the skulls. (.) many of the bodies of the
	66		aztecs that were found they have (.) big cracks in the (.) cranium.
	67		º
	68	B	hm:
	69	L	ºit was because of thatº
	70	F	ºbecause of this? º
	71	B	[where]?
	72	L	º[the skulls] º(2) [[go]]
	73	B	[[where they]] they get the the the iron (.) you
	74		don't know? ((laughs))
	75	L	( )
→	76	F	(3) <very go:od . (2) but Mary didn't say that.>
	77	B	no ((laughs))
→	78	F	did she. ((Bernardo laughs)). no. ok because i didn't hear ((very
	79		serious voice))
	80	B	yes ((smiley voice))
	81	L	it's a
→	82	F	((laughs)) ok

The above sequence exhibits an example of playful behaviour on Filomena's part as she does 'being the teacher' on lines 76 and 78. Here Filomena can be seen to shift to the teacher's

identity by giving a teacher's positive assessment of Lourenço's utterance on line 76. The fact she does this dramatically by lengthening the word 'good', and speaking in a paused, measured rhythm shows how she is 'hamming up' this role, thereby injecting a certain amount of humour into the situation. This can also be seen on line 78 where she answers the question she asks on line 76 and uses a lack of intonation and 'no' to 'reprimand' Lourenço for 'straying' from the task at hand, although she orients to the playful nature of these exchanges by laughing on line 82. Kotthoff (qtd. in Reddington and Waring 3) mention role reversal as a humour typology in the classroom and here we can see an example of this. Filomena overtly embodies the role of the teacher rather than that of a student by shifting her style of delivery to that of the disapproving teacher, thereby invoking laughter in the others.

Excerpts 2 and 3 show João and Carlos taking part in a correction and discussion task (Appendix 3) and show how João in particular uses humour to create a positive social dimension.

(2)

	27	C	you could give your friend an advice, (.) yes and you would
	28		tell him (2) a:h (.) i think the food (2)
	29	J	ºwasn't, isn't?º
	30	C	is , (.) or you can be polite and tell him that the food is e:h (2)
→	31	J	horrible ((laughter))

Reddington and Waring (6) identify three ways in which learners in the L2 classroom initiate humour through what they term disaligning extensions, by 'using a syntactically fitted extension to accomplish pragmatic subversion' through sequence pivots by 'producing talk that pivots to a new course of action' and sequence misfits, by 'producing a turn not projected by prior talk' (17). Excerpt 2 line 31 shows João taking part in a disaligning extension by completing Carlos's expression on the previous line. The preferred completion would have been *Tell him that*

the food is good. By extending Carlos's expression using 'Horrible', João is being playful and this is treated by both as such.

(3)

	137	C	if your friend eh
	138	J	has. (2) had. (1) had.
	139	C	had,
	140	J	had a horrible (1)
	141	C	a horrible haircut, would you tell him
→	142	J	of course!
	143	C	really! ((laughs))
	144	J	yes! ((smiley voice)) oh about the the the look, the the
→	145		style, that I'm honest.(.) oh you are ugly (1) or oh °you are
	146		hot° ((laughter)) >yes! it's true. no. no. < <if i'm really
	147		close with that person> but a strange oh (.) you are so hot
	148		((laughs)) no. (laughs) no. <I can't can't use this kind of
	149		expressions and socialising, socialising>
	150	C	and if it was a girl. would you tell her.
	151	J	yes!
	152	C	really?
	153	J	yes! yes!
	154	C	and if she was a beautiful woman, with a horrible hair.
	155		would you tell her
	156	J	yes I I [askid] to a::h (2) to go to my home
	157	C	and if she was a beautiful woman?
	158	J	and I cut his, he, her hair. (.) I'mself ((laughter)) (2) > well
	159		if I cut my, I could<
	160	C	>you cut your hair<?
	161	J	yes !
	162	C	>with a machine<?
	163	J	yes! and the the the (1)
	164	C	scissors.

	165	J	scissors. yes ( )
	166	C	well in my case i think i would (.) tell her only(.) if it would
	167		be ((laughs)) only if it would be a:: close person
	168	J	like your mother, your father, your brothers?
	169	C	my mother my sister, my brother my
→	170	J	>you have a sister<?
	171	C	ºnoº
	172	J	ah! ((laughter))
	173	C	eh [my cousin

Bell (134) reports that little empirical research has been carried out on the use and comprehension of L2 humour, but notes that theories of verbal humour have traditionally been based on the notion of incongruity. She adds that types of humour include 'jokes, narratives or anecdotes, one-liners, puns, riddles, irony, banter, hyperbole, teases, pranks, wordplay, mockery and parody'. Excerpt 3 shows how João and Carlos together construct a humorous imaginary scenario. From lines 144-149, João initially discusses how he would tell someone if they were hot or ugly, then, from lines 150-159 they discuss how João would invite a beautiful woman to his house to cut her hair, as he cuts his hair himself. Lastly, on line 170, João is involved in a sequence misfit (Reddington and Waring 13) by attending to Carlos's comment on his sister rather than attending to the topic under discussion – if someone had a horrible haircut would they tell him/her. As noted by Reddington and Waring this type of extension often has a subversive overtone, in this case unmasking Carlos as telling lies for the purpose of the task. Again both treat these sequences as humorous as can be seen through their mutual laughter.

Finally in excerpt 4, further examples of humour can be seen as Bernardo, Carlos and Eva in Class 2 complete a national stereotype discussion task (Appendix 4). The students have been asked to provide a typical name for the stereotypic Englishman today. A number of suggestions are made by all members of the group (lines 109, 112, 117 and 119) culminating in Carlos suggesting Sherlock Holmes on line 126, a fictional character well known to the Portuguese

through television. This is an example of how word play can introduce humour into peer oral interaction. The group then continue the task by describing the typical Portuguese woman today. This leads Carlos to suggest (line 198) that one difference between Portuguese women now and in the past is that in the past they had 'moustaches', i.e. facial hair, but that now women are more concerned about their appearance, and this provokes laughter amongst all three members of the triad.

(4)

	107	E	what's [his name] ((laughs))
	108	C	º[what's his] nameº
	109	B	john, ((laughs))
	110	E	john,
	111	B	john [is]
	112	E	[william], ((laughs))
	113	B	william.
	114	C	journey pipes.
	115	E	journey pipes. ((laughs))
	116	B	((laughs)) john or,
	117	C	(2) trevor ((laughs))
	118	B	trevor ((laughs))
	119	C	trevor sinclair ((B and M laugh))
	120	B	Sinclair it was the name of the: (.) the computer(.) no? ºthis is the:
	121		person who invent the the [first computer]º
	122	C	º[somebody make] a moveº
	123	B	ºI don't know.º
	124	C	º( )º
	125	B	do you ?
→	126	C	ºsherlock holmesº
	127	B	ºthink ofº
	128	E	ºsherlock º((laughs))
	187	C	womens are more beautiful, ((laughs))
	188	B	they dress (.) i think they dress better and

189 C they dress better
190 B and take care (.) take care of
191 C take care
192 B their theirselfs
193 E yes
194 C of their appearance,
195 E yes
196 B theirselves (.) more, (.) because in the past (2) eh: portuguese
197 womens are known (2)
→ 198 C °basically they have ((laughs)) (1) a moustache° ((laughs)) for
199 B having a mou:stache ((all 3 laugh)) and nowadays ((laughter)) (2)
200 with spas and ((laughter)) (4) and (2) esthetical centres, (.) they can
201 have

Excerpt 4 and the mention of the moustachioed women is an example of hyperbole or an anecdotal reminiscence of life in Portugal in the past. Again use of humour here, as in other contexts, could create a positive social dimension and encourage participation amongst learners.

It would seem that some of the learners in this study are adept at 'being playful' in the language learning classroom, and can bring their real world 'playful' personas to bear in peer interaction. Their humorous talk serves to make the language learning experience more enjoyable and motivating, could lower the affective filter, broadens the range of interactional patterns amongst peers, offers learning opportunities and allows them to explore different identities.

Conclusion

The language learning classroom is different to other classrooms students may experience in that it is social in nature. Within a sociocognitive framework, learning takes place in a social context through interaction with others, and it is this use of the language that promotes learning. In addition, interaction has long been seen as an activity which can promote learning opportunities from a cognitive viewpoint. The interaction hypothesis of SLA was formulated in the early 1980s and

much empirical research has been carried out in the intervening years which supports the link between interaction and L2 learning. These interactions can foster a sense of belonging, or can alienate. They can encourage or discourage positive attributions, especially in the task based learning classroom where oral interaction with a peer forms the basis of classroom activity.

However traditionally these studies have ignored the social setting which is intrinsic to any interaction in the L2 classroom. In the language learning classroom, the social context is a crucial factor for learning, and teachers who disregard its importance do so at their peril. As teachers, it is our responsibility to provide the best learning environment we can and although some may see their role simply as a conveyer of content, this will not lead to successful learning or teaching. Calls have been made over the years for more research which takes social factors into consideration. This study is a response to such calls and it adds to our knowledge of how learner talk can scaffold the affective states of others and create a positive social dimension conducive to learning. It is also important to point out that previous studies on humour in the language classroom mentioned here (Bell; Reddington and Waring) have looked at humour between native speakers and non-native speakers and between learners and the teacher respectively. The present study shows that learners use the same humour mechanisms while working together in pairs or groups as are used in learner/native speaker interaction.

As most work on humour in the L2 classroom to date has focused on episodes between teacher and learners, future research could usefully focus more on humour in peer to peer interactions. A useful additional tool in further research would be the use of video which could give a greater insight into non-verbal communication e.g. gesture, eye gaze and facial expression, and how learners use these to convey meaning and build relationships.

Note

[1] The term interlanguage was introduced by Selinker to refer to learner language and involved two fundamental notions. These were that learner language is a system, obeying its own rules and that this system is dynamic and changes over time (Selinker qtd. in Mitchell and Myles 39).

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APPENDIX 1. Transcription Conventions (adapted from Seedhouse 267-269 and Ohta 27)

:	Elongation of a syllable
(.)	Brief untimed pause
(3.2)	Interval between utterances (in seconds)
word	Speaker emphasis
!	Animated or emphatic tone
CAPITALS	Loud sound relative to surrounding talk
° °	Utterances which are noticeably quieter than surrounding talk
°° °°	Whispered utterances
< >	Talk produced slowly and deliberately
> <	Talk produced more quickly than surrounding talk
( )	Unclear or unintelligible speech or attempt to transcribe such speech
	A feature of special interest
⟶	Non-English words are written in italics and followed by English translation in
sim	double brackets
((tr.: yes))	Teacher
T:	Unidentified learner
L1:	Several or all learners simultaneously
LL:	Indicates overlap with portion in the next turn that is similarly
[	bracketed
	Indicates overlap with portion in the next turn that is similarly
[[	bracketed when the single bracket is used in the previous line and or
	turn so there will be no confusion regarding what brackets correspond to.
	Comments
(( ))	An approximation of the right sound in the case of inaccurate
[finished]	pronunciation
	Rising intonation
?	Slight rise in intonation
,	Falling intonation
.	Accentuated rise in intonation
↑	Accentuated fall in intonation
↓	

APPENDIX 2. Dictogloss Activity

I saw a really **interesting** programme on TV last night. It was a **documentary** about inventions. I didn't know that television **was invented** by a Scot in 1925, and I was **astonished** to learn that football **was first played by the Aztecs**.

Teacher's Notes

Read the text twice at normal speed both times. The first time the students just listen, the second time they make notes about the key information – then given them about 10 minutes to work together and reconstruct the text. They need to write a text that is grammatically correct and contains all the information – they don't need to rewrite exactly what was said.

Go round and then get someone to read theirs – check if it more or less approximates your version. You could then show them the above version in the IWB if you want. You could draw attention to the phrases in bold above – these are the things being recycled and maybe elicit some other names of TV programmes, -ing adjectives, extreme adjectives etc.

APPENDIX 3. "What if?" Correction and Discussion Task

Look at these sentences – some are correct and some have an error – can you correct the ones with an error?

- If you won a lot of money, you would move house?
- What you do if you didn't like the food your friend cooked for you?
- What country would you visit if you could travel anywhere in the world?
- If you needed to borrow some money, who would you ask?
- If your friend have a horrible haircut, would you tell him/her?

Now ask your partner the questions

APPENDIX 4. National Stereotypes Discussion Task

1. The image of a businessman in a bowler hat with a newspaper and umbrella used to be a stereotype of an Englishman. Do you think this is still true? If not, what would you consider a typical Englishman to be today?

- What does he wear?
- What does he eat for dinner?
- What does he do in his free time?
- What's his name?
- Think of 3 adjectives to describe him.

2. Now think about the typical Portuguese man/woman.

- How could you describe him/her?
- What does the typical Portuguese man or woman wear, eat, do in their free time?
- Think of some adjectives to describe them.

Are national stereotypes a good thing or can they be dangerous?