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THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

EFL CHALLENGES

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

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The Book of Proceedings

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EFL Challenges

Shaping the future of English Language Teaching

It is with great enthusiasm and a sense of commitment to the ELT community that we present the 37th Annual APPI Conference Book of Proceedings. This edition encapsulates diverse perspectives, research, and innovative pedagogical approaches that emerged during "The Future of Education: EFL Challenges", held in Braga at the Altice Forum. As APPI continues to serve as a platform for collaboration and professional growth, this volume stands as a testament to the dedication and expertise of ELT professionals in Portugal and beyond.

The theme of this year's conference was born from a collective reflection on the pressing challenges faced by EFL educators today. With an ever-evolving landscape influenced by artificial intelligence, digital transformation, multimodal learning, inclusivity, and the need for future-ready skills, APPI sought to bring together thought leaders, practitioners, and researchers to explore how English language education must adapt and innovate. The conversations, presentations, and workshops delivered throughout the event provided invaluable insights into the evolving role of educators in an interconnected and technology-driven world.

This Book of Proceedings is an extension of these discussions, compiling some of the contributions of esteemed speakers and researchers whose work enriches ELT practices. Each article highlights the depth and breadth of expertise within the APPI community and reinforces the importance of adaptability, critical thinking, and lifelong learning in ELT.

Daniel Xerri challenges us to move beyond mere AI literacy in Beyond AI Literacy: The Future Skills to Thrive in an AI-Powered World, emphasizing competencies such as analytical thinking, creative thinking, and evidence-based reasoning as essential to future-proofing English language education.

Libor Stepanek explores AI as a transformative tool in A New Buddy: Transforming English Teaching in the Era of Artificial Intelligence, shedding light on how AI can support teachers in course design, lesson planning, and feedback while maintaining human-cantered teaching approaches.

Janey Gregório delves into mediation as a core communicative skill in Mediation: A Challenge or an Asset?, offering insights into how the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) Companion Volume redefines mediation within EFL instruction.

Joana Silveira presents an important discussion on competency-based education in PASEO: The Challenge of Bringing it into the English Classroom in the 1st & 2nd Cycle, demonstrating how educators can integrate Portugal's Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling (PASEO) into English language curricula.

Teresa Maia reimagines assessment and engagement in A Painting, a Poem, a Movie, a Game, a Stamp, and a Smile: A Meaningful Journey, advocating for an arts-based, student-cantered approach that fosters emotional intelligence, creativity, and inclusive education.

Looking back, this conference was a celebration of shared knowledge and professional collaboration. The event's rich programme, featuring over 90 sessions, including plenaries, workshops, and PechaKucha presentations, offered delegates a dynamic space to engage with new ideas, technologies, and methodologies. The discussions on AI, digital pedagogies, multimodal learning, inclusive education, and sustainable development goals (SDGs) underscored the shifting priorities within our field and the necessity of preparing learners for the complexities of the modern world.

As editors of this volume, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all contributors who took the time to share their research and pedagogical reflections. We also thank the APPI organizing team for their dedication to making this event a success, ensuring that the ELT community in Portugal continues to have a space for meaningful discourse and professional growth.

We invite you to explore the articles in this Book of Proceedings as a source of inspiration and practical insights. May they serve as a catalyst for further inquiry, innovation, and collaboration in shaping the future of English language education.

The Editors

Carlos Lindade, João Rodrigues and Judite Fiúza

Beyond AI Literacy: The Future Skills to Thrive in an AI-Powered World

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Abstract

The massive impact that generative AI is having on a wide variety of social spheres suggests that education has to rapidly adapt so that young people are properly equipped to thrive in an AI-powered world. While arguing that the focus in ELT should not solely be on helping students to develop their AI literacy, this paper discusses four specific competencies that can enable them to position themselves successfully in the educational realm and beyond.

Keywords: future skills, analytical thinking, creative thinking, inquisitiveness, evidence-based thinking

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1. Introduction

In the past few years, generative AI has gained a significant amount of traction in a wide variety of industries and social domains. This has impacted not only the operations of business firms and other kinds of organisations, but has affected the productivity and work practices of their employees. While the changes brought about by AI are largely positive, the technology also puts into question a large number of jobs that are presently being done by human beings. For instance, the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2023) indicates that while in 2022 machines completed 34% of business tasks, this figure will rise to 42% by 2027. The consequence of this will be that 44% of employees' core skills will change in the next few years (WEF, 2023). Even though the automation process has been going on for many decades, AI is accelerating it so much that some people are concerned about whether their jobs will still exist in the near future. This has led the historian Yuval Noah Harari (2016) to predict that

> in the twenty-first century we might witness the creation of a massive new unworking class: people devoid of any economic, political or even artistic value, who contribute nothing to the prosperity, power and glory of society. This 'useless class' will not be merely unemployed — it will be unemployable. (p. 379)

While this might sound like a pretty grim prospect, the possibility that it might happen to millions of people around the world puts the onus on education to come up with solutions that help to mitigate the effects of this problem. This might require a shift in focus from the traditional emphasis on subject knowledge and specialisation to ensuring that young people are equipped with the skills to thrive in a world increasingly characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Doing so would enable them to take full command of their learning and career development, especially since some of the skills they need in the future might have to be learnt autonomously (Abidi & Joshi, 2018). The idea that certain skills need to be prized above everything else seems to be corroborated by reports published by different consultancy groups. For instance, it is estimated that by 2030, one in 16 workers may have to switch occupations partly as a result of automation (McKinsey & Company, 2023). In the coming 15 years, soft skill intensive jobs will constitute 63% of all employment (Deloitte, 2017), with social and emotional skills, and advanced cognitive capabilities being most valuable (McKinsey & Company, 2017).

Given the idea that ELT can be viewed as a vehicle for the development of competencies that are not strictly linguistic in nature (Mavridi & Xerri, 2020), it is worth considering what role it can play in helping young people navigate the human-machine

frontier. If ELT is to contribute to the development of those skills that help them to prepare for the future, it is not enough to merely direct attention to prompt engineering and other competencies forming part of AI literacy (Xerri, 2025b). While the latter is undoubtedly crucial for anyone wishing to interact with AI in an efficient manner, the cultivation of a plethora of other future skills should not be sidelined. Being in no way exhaustive, this paper consists of a brief discussion of the value of four of these skills.

2. Analytical thinking

Research based on insights derived from 803 companies – representing over 11.3 million employees across 27 industry sectors and 45 economies in all global regions – shows that analytical thinking is the most valued future skill by employers (WEF, 2023). It is defined as a cognitive process that involves identifying and breaking down a complex idea, problem, system, or process into individual components, analysing these components and their unique features or functions, and explaining or describing how these parts connect to form the whole (Brandt & Lorié, 2024). Analytical thinking involves a deep examination and critical assessment of data, and is essential for effective problem-solving and making well-informed decisions (Zhai et al., 2024). Pennycook et al. (2015) maintain that "The mere willingness to think analytically predicts a wide range of beliefs and worldviews, has a bearing on our moral judgments and values, and may also be associated with creativity and technology use" (p. 430). Some of the behavioural indicators of analytical thinking include:

- gathering information and data.
- selecting relevant data to pinpoint potential causes of the issue.
- critically assessing the issue by dividing it into smaller, manageable components.
- analysing the information to identify the most probable cause of the problem.
- determining logical and factual outcomes based on collected data and analysis.
- and identifying actions to minimise or fully prevent the issue from reoccurring (Chicago State University, n.d.).

The development of analytical thinking in the classroom is suitable for helping students deal with ambiguity since the reasoning process enables them to confront ill-defined problems more effectively (Robbins, 2011). The core of this approach is rooted in philosophy, assuming that the world operates rationally and that any situation can be examined logically to understand and analyse its fundamental aspects (Al-Shammari,

1995). As something that can be taught across educational domains and in an interdisciplinary manner, examples of analytical thinking skills that can be developed in the classroom include questioning ideas, dissecting concepts into individual components, analysing how these parts interact with each other and with the overall structure, recognising patterns and trends, and using sequential logic to explain a concept (Brandt & Lorié, 2024). The act of practising logic-based principles in education helps cultivate thinking habits that are applicable to a wide range of subjects and problems (Brandt & Lorié, 2024).

3. Creative Thinking

The second ranked competency in WEF's (2023) list of most prized skills for future employment is creative thinking, which is defined as the ability to produce valuable and original ideas, alongside developing innovative solutions to challenges. Its high placement in the list is not surprising given its well-established relationship with analytical thinking (Wani & Hussian, 2024), suggesting that employers see the two competencies as connected and equally indispensable. Consisting of the cognitive processes involved in generating a new invention or synthesis in any field, creative thinking leads to solutions that often utilise existing elements (such as objects or ideas) but form a novel connection or relationship between them (American Psychological Association, 2024).

Over the past few decades, creativity has become one of the bastions of good quality English language education (Xerri & Vassallo, 2016). This is a reflection of the increasing importance it is being given by educational authorities, policymakers, and intergovernmental organisations around the world. For example, the OECD (2024) maintains that encouraging students' creativity enables them to make meaningful contributions to society, both now and as future professionals. Outside the classroom, creative thinking allows them to navigate a world that is continuously evolving. For the OECD, creative thinking is so important that in 2022 it started assessing it as part of its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for 15-year-olds. The assessment covers four key areas: written expression, visual expression, social problem-solving, and scientific problem-solving (OECD, 2024). In each area, students work on open-ended tasks with no single correct answer, and they are prompted to offer multiple, unique responses or to create unconventional ones (OECD, 2024). These responses may include problem solutions, creative texts, or visual artifacts. The results show that excelling academically is not a requirement for excelling in creative thinking (OECD, 2024).

To foster students' creative thinking, teachers can adopt a range of research-informed strategies. First, they can build a strong foundation in domain-specific knowledge and connect ideas within a broader context, thus enhancing understanding (Gregory et al., 2013). Repetition, arts integration, and retrieval practices aid retention while open-ended prompts that encourage multiple, diverse answers nurture cognitive flexibility and collaboration, helping students explore alternative solutions (Gregory et al., 2013). Having students consider the feasibility of their ideas strengthens practical thinking while complex group work allows for richer exchanges, especially when teachers respond to students' answers (Gregory et al., 2013). Tools like checklists and summaries help maintain focus, allowing students to concentrate on creative problem-solving without losing essential information (Gregory et al., 2013). Lastly, the above strategies are very much dependent on teachers positioning themselves as creative practitioners since this does not only allow them to nurture creative thinking but to also model the process by teaching creatively (Xerri, 2013, 2017, 2018).

4. Inquisitiveness

A stronger creative thinking ability is closely linked to traits like intellectual openness, persistence, and curiosity (OECD, 2024). Even though curiosity and inquisitiveness are related intellectual virtues, the former is a passive motivation to search for epistemic goods whereas the latter is a restricted form of curiosity that is associated with the activity of questioning (Watson, 2018). Inquisitive people are "characteristically motivated to engage in good questioning" (Watson, 2015a, p. 273), this being the focus of Berger's (2014) *A More Beautiful Question*. In it, he argues that young people need to be equipped with the capacity to ask the right kind of questions because questions confront authority and disrupt established structures, processes, and systems, prompting them to consider alternative approaches (Berger, 2014). This idea is crucial given that when curiosity is motivated by the need to minimise uncertainty rather than by the joy of exploration, it can lead people to keenly acquire information but often without the discernment to differentiate fact from fiction (Zedelius et al., 2022). Given their lack of intellectual humility to acknowledge the limits of their flawed knowledge, this tendency can pose a societal risk, as such individuals are particularly inclined to spread misinformation to others (Zedelius et al., 2022).

Making inquisitiveness a key competency in the education of young people is vital for several reasons. It enables them to consider diverse perspectives, link unrelated ideas, creatively explore fresh angles, collaborate on solutions, and challenge

assumptions and established practices. The latter is particularly important given that inquisitiveness allows students to question their personal frames of reference. Education can foster intellectual humility by equipping students with the dispositions and skills needed to understand the importance of the confidence conditions that support their assertions, beliefs, and convictions (Watson, 2015b). These learning experiences also nurture other virtues essential for healthy interpersonal interactions, such as trust and open-mindedness, as students engage deeply with peers who will likely question and critique their confidence, encouraging growth through dialogue (Watson, 2015b). On the part of educators, this might involve encouraging constructive dissent in the classroom, opening conversations rather than closing them, and leading from the trenches (Gino, 2018). Modelling inquisitiveness through our teaching helps students to understand the value of nurturing it as part of their own critical engagement with learning.

5. Evidence-based thinking

Inquisitiveness is one of the individual motivating factors that determine how people assess the credibility of everyday sources of scientific information, which has a bearing on whether the decisions they take are evidence-based or not (Dawson et al., 2024). Even though misinformation and disinformation have been around since time immemorial, relatively recent events (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and the 2016 U.S. presidential election) seem to indicate that disinformation, in particular, is experiencing a higher incidence than in the past (The Economist, 2024). In fact, this is suggested by the renewed interest that researchers are expressing in the topic, with one systematic review showing that hundreds of scientific articles on the issue have been published over the past few years (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024). The higher incidence of disinformation is also making it harder for those who value the truth to fight back, a notion that is elegantly captured in what has become known as Brandolini's Principle: "The amount of energy needed to refute bullshit is an order of magnitude bigger than that needed to produce it" (Bergstrom & West, 2020, p. 11).

What this state of affairs seems to demand is a mindset that champions the value of evidence when engaging with or contributing information. This is where factfulness comes in handy, a concept and framework developed by the Swedish physician and statistician Hans Rosling. Factfulness is about understanding the world based on facts, rather than assumptions, biases, or outdated ideas (Rosling et al., 2018). As part of this framework, Rosling et al. (2018) underscore the importance of not giving in to several instincts, including the tendency to generalise about groups of people and perpetuate

stereotypes, and the tendency to rely on a single factor or viewpoint to explain complex issues. Factfulness provides a grounded, data-driven lens that encourages critical thinking and helps people avoid the cognitive biases that skew perceptions of the world (Rosling et al., 2018). By being encouraged to employ such an approach via their education, young people can learn to locate reliable sources, determine what is fake, question tradition and other influences, and challenge assumptions and judgement.

6. Conclusion

Given the accelerated rate of change that AI is contributing to, education plays an instrumental role in ensuring that young people are adequately prepared for the professional and social environments that will likely be impacted by these changes. Education's traditional focus on subject knowledge alone is insufficient to ensure that the rest of the twenty-first century becomes a period in which everyone can thrive and experience true freedom (Bates, 2024). Similarly, an exclusive focus on AI literacy is insufficient in properly furnishing young people with the skills they require to navigate the future. Hence, education should serve the purpose of helping young people to develop those competencies that are likely to enable them to operate successfully in the future. ELT, in particular, is well suited for this task because English language teachers are ideally positioned, through their classroom practices and principled convictions, to facilitate the development of such competencies (Mercer et al., 2020).

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A New Buddy: Transforming English Teaching in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

The integration of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) into language teaching presents both significant opportunities and challenges. AI tools can enhance course design, lesson planning, task creation, and some feedback provision, saving time and enriching the teaching process. This could turn AI tools into teachers' supportive "buddy". However, such AI tools currently lack human intuition, cultural awareness, and critical thinking capabilities, which makes teachers' oversight still crucial.

This article presents practical applications which not only demonstrate the potential of AI to enhance efficiency but also highlight its limitations, particularly in addressing sociocultural nuances and fostering critical thinking. Ethical considerations, including privacy and over-reliance risks, must guide AI adoption in classrooms. By blending AI capabilities with clear pedagogical goals and human experience, language teaching, and learning can be reshaped.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), language teaching, course design, task design, feedback

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1. Introduction

Since the release of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools for the general public in late 2022, technology has captivated global attention, revolutionized multiple sectors and inspired discussions on its impressively transformative impact on our lives. Language teaching and learning have been no exception. For language teachers, AI presents both a promising opportunity and a serious challenge: how to integrate AI tools into the classroom where interaction, contextual understanding, and creativity play crucial roles (Clarke, 2005; Bender et al., 2021; British Council, 2023) and how to enhance learning without diminishing the essential human elements of teaching.

This article presents AI as a "new buddy", as an innovative companion for teachers rather than a threat or replacement. Similarly to what the calculator did for Math teachers in the 1980s, AI has the potential to shift English teaching to new contexts. This text addresses some key questions of the AI use in the language classroom: Do we, the teachers, truly understand this "buddy"? What can this "buddy" do for us? How does AI fit into an educational framework centred on interaction and personal growth? Will the integration of AI make teaching essentially easier and learning more effective? And, perhaps most importantly, can AI become a genuine collaborator in creating a classroom environment where language is learnt not only as a set of rules but as a social tool? In detail, this article examines the potential of AI tools to support course design, lesson planning and some aspects of language tasks, exercises and feedback.

2. Who is our new buddy?

AI, our "new buddy", is not a person or a human being but a sophisticated digital assistant capable of performing a wide range of tasks. It is typically agreed upon that AI includes types of machines or ranges of algorithms and techniques which "are potentially capable of imitating or even exceeding human cognitive capacities, including sensing, language interaction, reasoning and analysis, problem solving, and even creativity" (UNESCO, 2019, p. 3). Using machine learning, natural language processing and vast datasets, AI can analyse and respond to language in meaningful ways, providing teachers with tools to save time and enhance the quality of their teaching. It can learn and adapt over time. In this way, it can offer tailored support to unique needs of individual classes or learners. It can provide language exercises, generate feedback and assist in course or lesson planning.

Unlike human teachers, however, it operates without a personal identity and we need to be constantly aware of the fact that AI is not a human being. Otherwise, we could be all too easily tempted "to ascribe human intentions, actions, even feelings to our machines" (Fuchs, 2022, p.58) and use them uncritically (Bender et al., 2021; IEEE, 2019).

3. Do we like our new buddy and can we work together?

Given current fragmentary research results and still developing didactic, pedagogical and methodological professional support, reactions to the rapid adoption of AI in classrooms of teachers are mixed. Some see it as a valuable supplement that supports their work by providing quick, adaptable teaching materials, assessment formats, or lesson structures. Others, however, fear that over-reliance on AI may not only disrupt traditional teacher-student relationships but also have a negative impact on critical and creative thinking. Major concerns, threats, and risks discussed include limits of both teachers and learners in technology use, "a lack of clarity on how personal information would be stored and shared" or the danger of "standardising languages and ideologies" (British Council, 2023).

Fully aware of these reservations, this article presents the integration of AI tools within the context of its potential enhancement of language teaching and learning, focusing on both practical advantages and challenges of their use.

4. How to collaborate with AI?

This article presents some types of collaboration on the example of the widely used ChatGPT tool, its free version. However, before choosing any particular tool, such as ChatGPT, it is recommended to try and test its alternatives, such as Claude, Google Gemini, and Microsoft Copilot, to find out which serves one's style of work best.

All prompts (the input or instructions to an AI tool to guide its output) can be written in diverse forms, such as a question, statement, command, or piece of text, in any language. The general rule is that the more concrete the prompt, the better the result of the output. The prompt can be produced in any language, e.g. asking in Portuguese to produce outputs in English. Diverse levels of politeness or directness can be used. General quality of the language in the prompts is irrelevant. The instructions are given to a machine and machines are not only non-judgemental, they can also understand

most instructions with stylistic, grammatical, and spelling errors. If misunderstood, one can always clarify their prompts later.

No matter how complex the output should be, it is typically generated within seconds. Each of the examples below in this text was generated in less than 20 seconds. This means, the time spent with the AI generation is minimal, the time-consuming part of the work lies still on the side of the teacher when formulating, clarifying, or specifying the prompts, and on critical analysis of the output later.

This article presents three practical types of applications of AI in English teaching, namely course design and lesson planning, exercise and task creation challenges, and feedback generation.

4.1 Course and lesson plan design

AI can quickly generate detailed course syllabi or lesson plans, tailored to specific language levels, group sizes and skill focuses. An example of a prompt for a course design can be the following: "Please, create a course syllabus with content, learning outcomes, forms of assessment, suggestions to books, films, and videogames and free additional activities for 15 sessions, each 1 hour long, for a class of 20 learners aged 10–12. The subject is English language, CEFR level A2, focus on speaking."

The output, which consists of a full description of all the points asked in the prompt, can be used as inspiration in a brainstorming phase if a teacher has no team to collaborate with, as a final draft for purely formal institutional purposes, or as an almost ready-to-use material that needs only a few adjustments before it is used as a course outline. If more modifications are needed, one can continue in the "discussion" with the AI tool and ask, for example, for the following: "Please, change this to focus on all language skills. And highlight group activities which can be done outside of class."

Prompts for lesson planning tend to be even more concrete, e.g. "Create a 45-minute lesson with content, types of activities, learning outcomes, forms of assessment, and suggestions for free additional activities for a class of 16 learners aged 16–17. Subject is English language, CEFR level B1, topic Media, focus on reported speech, all skills practiced, the session should include whole class work, work in groups, work in pairs and individual work."

Again, AI-generated lessons based on such a prompt will provide a structured yet flexible foundation that teachers can adapt to their real class dynamics.

4.2 Exercise and task creation

AI excels at generating diverse language exercise types. It can create exercises to all types of language practice such as vocabulary building and collocations awareness, specific grammar points, or more complex language use. Due to the level of detail, one needs to be more careful with the prompts, however, there are cases when AI reaches its current limits as well. Let's analyse three examples:

4.2.1 Example 1 (general context)

The original prompt was the following: "Create three types of exercises to practice present perfect in English on B1 level. Each exercise needs to have sentences, all sentences should refer to sport activities. The exercise is for learners of the age of 13. Provide also correct answers."

The AI-generated output included the following:

"Exercise 1: Fill in the blanks

1. I .... (play) soccer for five years.

2. She .... (not try) ice-skating before."

Since the language learners were meant to be students in Portugal, it was necessary to tailor the content to the Portuguese reality, avoiding the US term for the game commonly known as football in Europe and sports rather rare in Portugal, namely ice-skating. These results are based on the fact that the algorithms have been trained by scanning the global Internet, where the US version of English and US reality dominate.

Therefore, the AI was instructed: "Change the sport activities into a more Portuguese reality." Due to the fact that this prompt was too general, the AI tool misunderstood and provided a surprising output:

"1. I .... (praticar) futebol há cinco anos.

2. Ela .... (não experimentar) surf antes."

This would be considered a highly unusual reaction "in a human world" as humans would be fully aware of the general context of the real world we live in in this situation. Because AI is a machine, one always has to think about the general level of context that needs to be specified in order to achieve the desired outcome. In this case, an explanatory prompt, "Sorry, keep the language English, just change the sports, so

that they reflect Portuguese popular sports", was enough to produce a Portuguese reality based set of exercises:

"1. I .... (play) football for five years.

2. She .... (not try) surfing before."

4.2.2 Example 2 (exactness of prompts)

Sometimes it is not the context but the actual wording of the prompt which needs to be corrected or explained in detail. For example, a prompt "Create some sayings and proverbs on spring weather" brought a set of new, unknown sayings, such as: "Spring showers bring forth May flowers" or "April's whispers unlock May's treasures". Given the situation in which the learners were expected to familiarise themselves with existing English sayings or proverbs, this was an undesirable output.

In this case, the problem can be identified as a bad word choice, namely selection of the verb "create". Its literal definition is "to bring something into existence, to produce or design something new", which is why the response of the machine was precise, it produced new sayings and proverbs. When the prompt was changed to: "List the most frequent sayings and proverbs on spring weather", the AI produced the expected output, offering a list of well-known English sayings and proverbs e.g. "April showers bring May flowers" or "Blossoming like a flower in spring".

This example sheds some light on how teachers need to be aware of the importance of being precise and accurate while giving their instructions to the AI tools.

4.2.3 Example 3 (critical thinking)

Effective language learning is inherently social, involving negotiation of meaning and shared understanding. As highlighted by Thornbury (2005) and Boomer et al. (1992), learning occurs through interactive, co-constructed dialogues between teachers and learners. AI can foster effective learning environments by facilitating collaborative projects or role-play activities. For example, it can develop multiple alternative conversation scenarios, e.g. "Write ten dialogues on the topic of moving to a different country for two people, taking place in a park, in a late May weekend afternoon before rain" or "Provide ten settings for a dialogue to happen. The topic is always 'beginning of a friendship' and the settings differ in the age and relationships of the two persons, their mood, place, time of the day, of the year and the weather."

However, fostering problem-solving skills and critical thinking has, currently, its limits. The following example shows an activity where learners should identify a critical reading problem. The original instruction for a class is: "Read the texts below critically and explain what the aim of the author is. Can we trust the author? Why? Why not?: 'There are clear disparities between the treatment of white and other non-white drug users in the USA. A recent survey of the US Public Health Service estimated that 75% of illegal drug-users in the US were white, 13% Afro-American, and 9% Hispanic. Yet, in New York State, 93% of all drug-possession offenders sent to prison were Afro-American and Hispanic; in California, it was 72%.'"

In class, students discuss the text and typically sooner or later realise that while it seemingly emphasises systemic racial disparities in how drug offenses are prosecuted and punished in the US, it is manipulative. The author compares the incomparable, namely the percentage for illegal drug-users for the whole of the USA is being compared to the percentage of those prosecuted in two US states only, not the US as a whole.

When asking the AI tool to identify the problem in critical reading, the AI tool was unable to do so. It offered general explanations, e.g. "The problem in critical thinking in this paragraph lies in the interpretation and presentation of statistical data without considering additional contextual factors. While the statistics provided highlight disparities in the treatment of drug users based on race, critical thinking would involve considering other relevant factors that could contribute to these disparities." or general statements, e.g. "By engaging in critical thinking, one can move beyond presenting statistics at face value and delve deeper into understanding the complex interplay of factors that contribute to disparities in the criminal justice system.".

Alternations of the prompts were tried but the AI could never understand or identify the critical reading problem itself. Once again, teachers need to keep in mind that AI is not a human being with its personal experience and general knowledge of the world to become a fully critical reader yet. Therefore, complex activities which include critical thinking can be tried out, but the AI outputs need to be carefully analysed before used in class.

5. Feedback provision

AI-generated feedback, focused typically on quality, accuracy or clarity, can guide learners through grammar and vocabulary corrections. Additionally, it can detect sentence structures that may hinder comprehension. In this way, it can encourage

learners to become more autonomous in self-assessment and allow teachers to focus on deeper, qualitative aspects of language use.

Teachers' role in feedback is key. Similarly to the case of critical reading or thinking, the AI feedback capabilities are limited. For example, in providing text analysis or constructive comments and formative feedback, the AI-generated results tend to be superficial. The reason is again the difference between a machine and a human being. While human-generated feedback is based on a range of factors, such as personal experience, individual perception, cognition and emotions, personal bias and perspectives, given cultural and social norms, general context and environment, or understanding of the author's aims, the AI-generated feedback is based on an algorithm.

Teachers and learners who use AI-generated feedback should not be misled by its formal quality. The illusion of individualised, carefully crafted feedback provided by AI is almost perfect, but it is only an illusion. It is based on a simple style: general phrases and advice are accompanied by adequate examples from the original texts, e.g. "The author demonstrates critical thinking by both agreeing and disagreeing with Johnston's points, providing reasoning and examples to support their arguments." (a general comment on critical thinking applicable to almost any text is accompanied by the name of an author used a source in the original text) or "The author uses descriptive language to vividly portray their experiences (a general comment on the purpose of the use of almost any descriptive language), such as 'incredible moments', 'unpleasant situations' and 'delicious cuisine' (examples from the original text). These descriptions help readers connect emotionally with the narrative." (a general comment applicable to almost any text again). While such feedback on the "language mechanics", e.g. "Expand the vocabulary related to positive experiences beyond 'incredible moments'. Include specific adjectives like 'captivating cultural encounters' and 'memorable culinary delights'.", is useful and, typically, of the same quality as if provided by a human teacher, the algorithm has been trained on "human feedback givers"; after all, the critical section of feedback, due to its complexity, should always be provided by a human.

6. Conclusion

The intention of this text was to show that AI is a buddy that can help. AI tools are not here to replace teachers but to act as versatile partners, assisting in course design, lesson planning, task creation, and some parts of feedback provision. However, it is a buddy with its limitations. It lacks human intuition and the ability to fully understand complex sociocultural nuances, which are critical in language learning. Moreover, ethical

considerations, including the potential for over-reliance on AI, privacy concerns, and the need to maintain a balanced teacher-student relationship, should always be part of the discussion on how, when, how often, and for what purposes AI should be used.

In conclusion, with clearly defined pedagogical objectives and teacher guidance, AI can enrich the educational experience of learners, offering a blend of efficiency and interactivity that enhances both teaching and learning. While there are challenges, a balanced and thoughtful integration of AI has the potential to develop language teaching further, making it more responsive, interactive, and inclusive of diverse learner needs.

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Mediation: A Challenge or an Asset?

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Abstract

One of the novelties in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume* (CEFR/CV) is the broader approach to mediation. There are descriptive scales, from PreA1 to C2 level, provided for both mediation activities and strategies. When reflecting on how to incorporate mediation skills into the learning, teaching, and assessment process, this may be viewed as a challenge or an asset, or maybe even both. For young learners the challenge may seem overwhelming. However, mediation is key to developing plurilingual and pluricultural competences which enable active participation as global citizens in a constantly evolving diverse globalised world.

Therefore, if it facilitates communication, collaboration and understanding, it is important to give learners a head start, by introducing them to mediation. In doing so, we are also enhancing the development of competence areas in the *Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling* (PASEO).

Keywords: mediation, competence areas, young learners

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1. Introduction

When looking at mediation at first glance, it may seem far reaching to introduce it into a syllabus that focuses on English language learning for young learners. Whether it is viewed as a challenge or an asset by educators, it is firstly important to understand what mediation is.

Then it must be looked at considering how it is conceptualised as one of the four modes of communication in the CEFR/CV. This will enable the understanding of the different communicative language activities and strategies. The focus will be on the activities, because descriptive levels for strategies only begin at A2 level and the aim here is to see how young learners may be introduced to mediation at the earliest stage of language learning.

Lastly, but most importantly, it is essential to understand what mediation looks like in the classroom. Analysing classroom activities or tasks to recognise mediation activities will help to intentionally design sequences that facilitate their development throughout the learning, teaching, and assessment process.

2. The concept of mediation

When delving into the concept of mediation in broad terms, for example in the *Cambridge Dictionary*, it implies "talking to two separate people or groups involved in a disagreement to help find them agree or find a solution to their problems" (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). To mediate is to talk to these two separate parties to help reach an agreement or find a solution to the problem. The mediator is then the person who interacts with the two parties to aid in reaching an agreement or finding a solution to the problem.

When mediation is looked at through the lens of the CEFR/CV, disagreement or problem is not the main issue, communication becomes the relevant factor. It is

> [the process of using language] . . . not just to communicate a message, but rather to develop an idea through what is often called "languaging" (talking the idea through and hence articulating the thoughts) or to facilitate understanding and communication. (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 35).

When more than one language may be used, "languaging" becomes "translanguaging". This clearly shows how mediation is essential to developing plurilingual and pluricultural competences. In this case then, to mediate is to "make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to

communicate with each other directly" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 34), regardless of an existing disagreement or problem. The mediator is viewed as

> [a] user/learner [that] acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes across modalities (e.g. from spoken to signed or vice versa, in cross-modal communication) and sometimes from one language to another (cross-linguistic mediation). (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90)

Viewing the learner as a "social agent" is particularly relevant for educators because room must be made for them to exercise their autonomy to rehearse this role.

By looking at everyday life activities it is easy to see how individuals facilitate communication in various domains. In the personal domain, when a government agency document is read to relay specific information to elderly family members, who for whatever reason may not understand the language being used. In the professional domain for example, as teachers, when data and research is shared on brain-friendly learning strategies with colleagues to enhance learning strategies.

In the first instance, mediating a text by relaying specific information in speech is necessary to help a family member understand the document. When colleagues in the same field are sharing relevant information to enhance their performance as professionals, it may be considered collaborating in a group to construct meaning (Council of Europe, 2020). It is easy to see how mediation is present in daily activities that involve many aspects of life. Therefore, if one of the aims of education is to prepare individuals to interact with ease in different realms, which are multilingual and multimodal, then different types of mediation activities must be rehearsed with learners through real-life tasks.

3. Mediation activities in the CEFR companion volume

The CEFR/CV presents four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction, and mediation. Each mode encompasses a variety of communicative language activities which enhance overall communicative competence. New to the reception activities is audiovisual comprehension, and online interaction is new to the interaction activities, due to the multimodality in which knowledge and information is shared. Focusing on mediation, a range of new communicative language activities have been added.

To better understand mediation, it may be looked at as an umbrella term that involves activities from one or more of the other three modes of communication. Note-taking, for example, is considered a mediation activity within mediating a text. When an individual takes notes in the context of a lecture, seminar or meeting, two other

communicative language activities are activated from two other modes of communication, reception and production: listening comprehension and written production.

There are fourteen mediation activities arranged into three broader groups – mediating a text, mediating communication and mediating concepts – subdivided into two subgroups, collaborating in a group and leading a group work. The level at which descriptors appear for each activity varies based on the complexity, but mediation activities can start at anywhere from PreA1 to A2 plus level.

The introduction of performance descriptors for PreA1 and plus levels is another relevant novelty of the CEFR/CV. The concepts of "Language A" and "Language B" used in various mediation activity descriptors are also important to highlight in relation to the descriptors for the mediation activities. They can refer to two different languages, varieties of the same language, registers of the same variety, as exemplified by the reading of government agency documents to elderly family members, modalities of the same language, any combination of the above or identical (Council of Europe, 2020). This stands to reason that the main aim of mediation is to facilitate communication, regardless of the context.

As teachers of young learners, the focus should be on those that start at a PreA1 or A1 level to facilitate gradual acquisition avoiding undesirable difficulties. In terms of mediating a text, relaying specific information starts at pre-A1, processing text, translating written text, and expressing a personal response to creative texts all start at A1 level. As for mediating communication, facilitating pluricultural space, acting as an intermediary in informal situations and facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements all begin at A1 level. Looking at the two subgroups of mediating concepts, collaborating in a group, which includes facilitating collaborative interaction with peers and collaborating into construct meaning, as well as encouraging conceptual talk when leading group work all initiate similarly at A1.

Through this quick glance at mediation activities, it is easy to see that young learners can engage in mediation activities starting with mediating a text by relaying specific information in speech or writing. The challenge now lies in bringing them into our classroom in the many diverse contexts of the Portuguese educational system.

4. Mediation activities in the classroom

Before bringing the mediation activities straight away into the classroom, it may be wise to see where they are embedded in the Portuguese curriculum reference documents. Although not explicitly referenced in the Portuguese curriculum, in the English learning standards, *Aprendizagens Essenciais* (Direção-Geral da Educação, n.d.), the strategic competences, and in particular the strategic teaching strategies linked to the PASEO (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2017), may be used to develop mediation.

Figure 1 shows how the PASEO is organised (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2017, pp. 16-17). There are ten competence areas and, as in the example presented for Languages and texts, each one has defining operational descriptors.

COMPETENCE AREAS

- BODY AWARENESS AND MASTERY
- LANGUAGES AND TEXTS
- AESTHETIC AND ARTISTIC SENSITIVITY AWARENESS
- INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
- WELL-BEING, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT
- CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING
- PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND AUTONOMY
- REASONING AND PROBLEM SOLVING
- INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS
- SCIENTIFIC TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

KNOWLEDGE · ATTITUDES · SKILLS

OPERATIONAL DESCRIPTORS

Students use verbal and non-verbal languages to mean and communicate, using gestures, sounds, words, numbers, and pictures. They use them to build knowledge, to share meanings in its different areas and to express worldviews.

Students recognise and use symbolic languages as representative elements of the real and the imaginary, essential to the processes of expression and communication within different contexts (personal, social, learning and pre-professional).

Students master the codes that enable them to read and write (in native and foreign languages). They understand, interpret and express facts, opinions, concepts, thoughts and feelings, whether orally, in writing, or through other codifications. They identify, use and create various linguistic, literary, musical, artistic, technological, mathematical and scientific products, recognising their meanings and generating new ones.

Figure 1: PASEO's competence areas and example of an operational descriptor

Essentially, by attentively reading the operational descriptors for each competence area and comparing them with the descriptors for the different mediation activities in the CEFR/CV, a correlation may be found as shown in the Table 1 below.

Mediation Activities in *CEFR Companion Volume*		Competence Areas: *Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling*
Mediating a text	Relay specific information (in speech / in writing) begins at **Pre-A1**	**A** Languages and texts
	Explaining data (in speech / in writing) begins at **A2+**	**I** Scientific, technical and technological knowledge
	Processing text (in speech / in writing) begins at **A1**	**B** Information and communication **F** Personal development and autonomy
	Translating a written text (in speech / in writing) begins at **A1**	**A** Languages and texts
	Note-taking begins at **A2**	**B** Information and communication **F** Personal development and autonomy
	Expressing a personal response to creative texts begins at **A1**	**H** Aesthetic and artistic sensitivity/awareness
	Analysis and criticism of creative texts begins at **A2**	**D** Critical and creative thinking
Mediating concepts	**Collaborating in a group work** Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers begins at **A1**	**E** Interpersonal relations
	Collaborating to construct meaning begins at **A1**	**E** Interpersonal relations **C** Reasoning and problem solving
	Leading group work Managing interaction begins at **A2**	**E** Interpersonal relations **G** Well-being, health and environment
	Encouraging conceptual talk begins at **A1**	**E** Interpersonal relations **C** Reasoning and problem solving
Mediating communication	Facilitating pluricultural space begins at **A1**	**E** Interpersonal relations **J** Body awareness and mastery
	Acting as an intermediary begins at **A1**	**E** Interpersonal relations **B** Information and communication
	Facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements begins at **A1**	**E** Interpersonal relations

Table 1: Mediation Activities Correlated with Competence Areas in the PASEO

This correlation was only possible after careful analysis of the operational descriptors. However, unlike the mediation activities, which have descriptors for various performance levels, the competence areas describe what learners should be able to do at the end of compulsory education. Hence, there was a need to describe what learners may be able to do at earlier stages of learning to understand what observable behaviours to look for. This ensures gradual development of each competence area, and that planning is intentionally aimed for learners to attain these competences. Table 2 is an example of how operational descriptors may be designed for lower grade levels, found in the *Orientações Curriculares, Inglês, 1.º e 2.º ciclos do ensino básico, curriculum guidelines for English language learning in the Azores*.

COMPETENCE AREAS	SUGGESTED OPERATIONAL DESCRIPTORS		
	Years 1 & 2	Years 3 & 4	Years 5 & 6
Languages and texts	Use body language and pictures to aid communication	Select with guidance representative elements that aid communication: body language, gestures, images …	Create with guidance simple products using verbal and non-verbal language to generate new meaning
Information and communication	Organise with guidance very basic information provided in order to prepare a presentation of a very simple new product	Select with guidance simple information which they are provided with to prepare and present a new simple product	Research topics familiar to them with guidance to create and present a new simple product
Reasoning and problem solving	Follow very simple guidelines to solve very concrete problems to complete a very simple task	Select with guidance strategies to complete a simple task	Recognise with guidance suitable strategies to accomplish tasks related to familiar situations Question a situations or simple problems and offer solutions with guidance
Critical and creative thinking	Use simple criteria to organise very simple information Participate in very simple tasks, expressing their individuality	Select with guidance simple ideas and ways to carry out a simple task Create with guidance situations to apply learning	Adapt, with guidance, ideas and procedures in familiar contexts Participate in a guided discussion supporting their ideas with what they have learnt Create a new situation, based on acquired knowledge, expressing their individuality
Interpersonal relations	Listen to others following turn taking norms, using very simple appropriate social expressions	Contribute with guidance to the accomplishment of a task, valuing the diversity of ideas	Collaborate to complete a task, valuing and incorporating contributions and ideas different from theirs Collaborate with guidance to solve problems, in a classroom / school setting, to help reach consensus.
Personal development and autonomy	Recognise strengths and weaknesses in their learning in a very guided setting	Select, with guidance, ways to enhance learning and/or overcome challenges	Recognise, with guidance, strategies to enhance learning and/or overcome challenges
Well-being, health and environment	Maintain with guidance learning material and space clean and organised	Help maintain the learning environment clean and organised Recognise with guidance healthy eating, hygiene and exercise habits that contribute to one's well-being as well as that of others	Take on behaviour that contributes to one's well-being as well as the well-being of other with guidance
Aesthetic and artistic sensitivity/awareness	Express likes and preferences pertaining to music, drawings, pictures …	Value, with guidance, aesthetic aspects related to cultural expression	Identify with guidance the importance of aesthetic aspects in familiar contexts Use, with guidance, aesthetic aspects (colour, visual effects, movement, sound, etc.) with the work produced in different formats
Scientific, technical and technological knowledge	Use previously selected resources with a lot of guidance	Use resources at their disposal following very clear guidelines	Select with guidance resources that best suit the needs of a task
Body awareness and mastery	Complete very guided activities to develop fine motor skills and body posture activities, respecting the shared space	Manage with guidance the learning space relating to oneself and others	Explore with guidance movement that enhances learning

Table 2: Operational Descriptors for PASEO Competence Areas for Years 1 to 6

Again, many of these descriptors correlate with different mediation activities at the lower proficiency levels of the CEFR/CV starting at PreA1.

Having seen that it is embedded in the Portuguese curriculum reference documents, it becomes obvious that if following these guidelines, the activities that are being used in the classroom to date already promote mediation skills. Notwithstanding this fact, as in many instances, if not purposefully planning for the development of these skills, the desired outcomes may not be reached.

The figures below show a number of different activities that may look familiar, accompanied by a mediation activity descriptor (Dooley & Obee, 2022; Dooley & Obee, 2023; Dooley, 2024). The aim is to help understand and create awareness of where and

how mediation, alongside the competence areas in the PASEO, may be enhanced in the English language classroom with young learners.

Figures 2 to 8 are examples of different mediation activities as defined in the CEFR/CV (Council of Europe, 2020). Figures 2 to 5 may all represent mediating text activities. Figure 2 is an example of relaying specific information in speech at a PreA1 level: "Can relay simple instructions about places and times, provided these are repeated very slowly and clearly." Figure 3 is an example of processing text at an A1 level: "Can copy out single words and short texts presented in standard printed format." Figure 4 demonstrates how personal responses to creative text in writing may be designed at an A1 level: "Can use simple words/signs to state how a work made them feel." Figure 5 exemplifies translating written text in writing at an A1 Level: "Can, with the help of a dictionary, translate simple words/signs and phrases (from Language A into Language B), but may not always select the appropriate meaning."
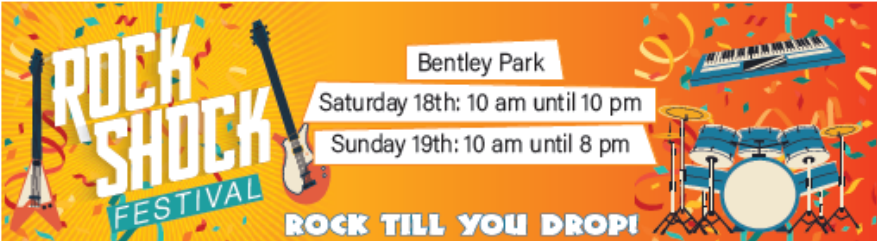
Making an invitation – Accepting/Refusing

1 🎧 Listen and complete the dialogue with the words in the list.

- noon - house - Food - birthday - Sunday

Julie:	Hi, Tim! Do you want to go to the festival next weekend?
Tim:	What festival?
Julie:	The 1) _____ Festival in Palmer Park.
Tim:	Oh, yes! It sounds fun. When is it?
Julie:	It's on Saturday, from 2) _____ until 10 pm.
Tim:	On Saturday? Oh, no! It's my cousin's 16th 3) _____ party on Saturday. We're going to his house in Birmingham.
Julie:	Well, the festival is on 4) _____ too, from 11 am until 4 pm. Why don't we go then?
Tim:	Great! I'd love to!
Julie:	Cool! Meet me outside my 5) _____ at half past ten.
Tim:	Sounds good!

2 Use the poster to act out a similar dialogue to Ex. 1.

ROCK SHOCK FESTIVAL

Bentley Park
Saturday 18th: 10 am until 10 pm
Sunday 19th: 10 am until 8 pm

ROCK TILL YOU DROP!

Figure 2: PreA1 Level – relaying specific information in speech

Figure 3: A1 Level - Processing a text

Figure 4: A1 Level - Personal response to creative text

Figure 5: A1 Level Translating written text in writing

Figures 6 and 7 are examples of Mediating concepts activities. For example, in Figure 6 when learners get acquainted with the classroom language, they do so to generate communication for learning. A classroom environment is a natural setting for collaborating in a group and facilitating collaborative interaction with peers. At an A1 level, this may mean they "can indicate that they understand and ask whether others understand." When they are collaborating to construct meaning at an A1 level, it may also be that they "can express an idea and ask what others think, using very simple words/signs and phrases provided they can prepare in advance", as in Figure 7.

Figure 6: A1 Level Collaborating in a group, facilitating collaborative interaction with peers

Figure 7: A1 Level Collaborating in a group, collaborating to construct meaning

Figure 8 may be considered Mediating communication for facilitating pluricultural space at an A1 level, "Can facilitate an intercultural exchange by showing a welcoming attitude and interest with simple words/signs and non-verbal signals, by inviting others to contribute, and by indicating whether they understand when addressed directly".

Figure 8: A1 Level Mediating communication, facilitating pluricultural space

Many of these activities or tasks look familiar; however, many times they are completed as just another task in the textbook, without a full understanding of their potential. In order to help learners develop the skills they need to master, they should be intentionally approached, specifically aiming to enhance learners' ability to tackle the challenges of today's global world.

5. Final remarks

At the beginning of the session, a survey was conducted to better understand the audience's outlook on mediation. As shown in Figure 9, more than half of the teachers portrayed mediation as a challenge.
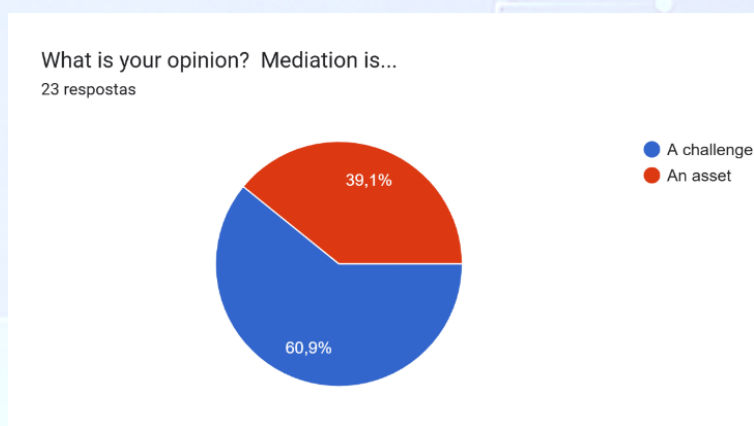
Figure 9: Survey at the beginning of the session

During the session, mediation was explored as a bridge-building process, where individuals enable communication and understanding across linguistic, cultural, and modal barriers. There was also an attempt to demonstrate that mediation can be found in many areas of the curriculum reference documents in the Portuguese context. The sample of activities presented exemplifies the versatility and real-world applicability of mediation.

Hence, learners need to be taught to mediate texts concepts and communication by intentionally rehearsing real-life activities and tasks. While it requires effort and adaptability, the benefits of mediation in fostering co-construction of meaning, understanding, collaboration, and inclusion make it an invaluable asset in education and beyond. The relevance of mediation for developing plurilingual and pluricultural competences sets a foundation to enable learners to become global citizens and leaders capable of addressing complex issues, like pandemics and wars. This was clearly understood by more than 80% of the audience by the end of the session, as seen in Figure 10.
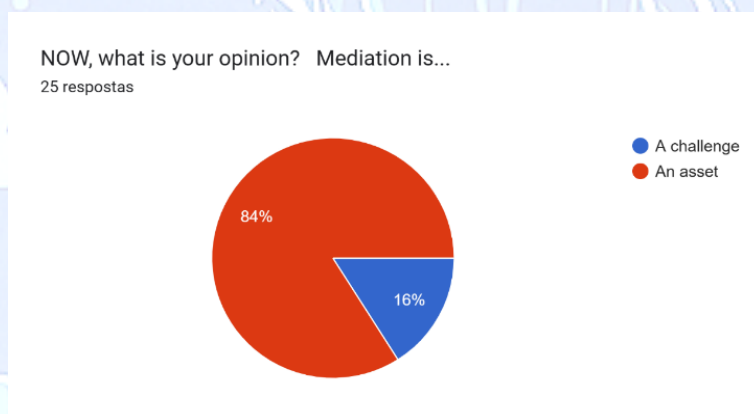
Figure 10: Survey at the end of the session

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PASEO: The Challenge of Bringing it into the English Classroom in the 1st & 2nd cycle

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Abstract

To attain a specific student profile by the end of compulsory education, there is a need to start developing it from the start in year 1. It was with this in mind that, in the Azores, the ten competence areas in the *Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling*, better known as the PASEO, were dismantled, making them age and level appropriate for years 1 to 6. Operational descriptors were designed to be observable and attainable for these grade levels. This document is part of the English language guidelines for the regional education system: *Orientações Curriculares, Inglês, 1.º e 2.º ciclos do ensino básico*. How this was put into practice to overcome the challenge of addressing the PASEO in the learning, teaching, and assessment process will be shared throughout this article.

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1. Introduction

The *Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling,* forthwith referred to as PASEO, is the underlying curriculum document of the Portuguese educational system, both at a national and regional level (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2017b). As such, when the *Orientações Curriculares, Inglês, 1.º e 2.º ciclos do ensino básico* were designed by the PACIS XXI team as guidelines for English language learning in years 1 to 6 (Direção Regional da Educação e Administração Educativa, 2022), it goes without saying that a detailed analysis of the PASEO's competence areas was carried out. Most importantly, the operational descriptors were calibrated to better understand what they might look like at each learning stage, to facilitate use by educators in the learning, teaching, and assessment process at lower grade levels.

The PASEO is also aligned with the *National Strategy for Citizenship Education* (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2017a). Many reference documents pertaining to different world issues have been designed and shared with the educational community. Teachers have access to an array of resources for different grade levels to develop knowledge and awareness of these issues. The aim is to integrate these with the development of curriculum content, to ultimately promote a global citizenship in all learners. Subsequently, a thought-provoking question arises: *Should we educate for citizenship or in citizenship?*

This distinction underscores the importance of moving beyond traditional language instruction to foster students' active participation in a pluralistic and interconnected world. Language learning becomes not just a skill acquisition process but a gateway to cultural understanding and global awareness. Learners need not only to practise language in communicative settings in the classroom, but they also need to rehearse how communication occurs in a context of global citizenship *as citizens*.

2. Competence areas in the PASEO and communicative language activities

The development of competences occurs through the intertwined acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In the context of English language learning, as learners acquire the knowledge of the language structures, they simultaneously develop the skills to use these structures, while putting in practice different competence areas of the PASEO. Hence, making for a more holistic action-oriented approach to language learning. All this is put into place through different communicative activities based on

situational themes that enable learners to engage in and demonstrate learning that promotes communicative competence but also more holistic competences as global citizens.

The ten competence areas in the PASEO that are not subject- or time-bound are based on universal democratic values and are transversal to all curricular subjects. All subjects, including English, must orchestrate ways of incorporating the development of all ten areas in the learning. These competence areas describe what a learner should be able to do throughout their learning process as well as by the end of compulsory education.

As the PASEO is based on the OECD Learning Compass 2030, its fundamental aim is to promote life-long learning. When analysing the operational descriptors for each competence area, it is evident that they are organised from the less complex to the more complex. This enables educators to help learners progress holistically in learning; however, in the PASEO, these describe observable behaviours at an upper-secondary level.

Thus, there was an urgency to describe observable behaviours at lower levels because the development of a students' profile by the end of compulsory education must start at the beginning of schooling. These operational descriptors for the lower grades were constructed in accordance with learners' cognitive and language level, as shown in Table 1 (Direção Regional da Educação e Administração Educativa, 2022, pp. 49-51). In order to assure that there was time for educators to plan in conformity with learners' needs and for learners to have time to develop each competence level aligned with the operational descriptor at each stage, they were designed to be attained over a two-year time span. For example, educators were able to spread these ten areas over a two-year span, meaning they could work on five competence areas per year, instead of ten, promoting a more intentional focus on each area.

ÁREAS DE COMPETÊNCIA	DESCRITORES OPERATIVOS		
Linguagens e textos	**1.º e 2.º Anos** Utiliza a linguagem corporal e imagens para apoiar a comunicação	**3.º e 4.º Anos** Seleciona, com apoio, elementos representativos que auxiliam a comunicação: linguagem corporal, imagens, …	**5.º e 6.º Anos** Cria, com apoio, produtos simples, utilizando linguagens verbais e não verbais, para gerar novos sentidos básicos
Informação e comunicação	**1.º e 2.º Anos** Organiza, com apoio, informação muito básica fornecida, para elaborar a apresentação de um novo produto muito simples	**3.º e 4.º Anos** Seleciona, com apoio, informação simples, que lhe é fornecida para elaborar e apresentar um novo produto simples	**5.º e 6.º Anos** Pesquisa, com apoio, sobre temáticas que lhe são familiares para construir e apresentar um novo produto simples
Raciocínio e resolução de problemas	**1.º e 2.º Anos** Segue orientações muito simples para resolver problemas muito concretos para realizar tarefas muito simples	**3.º e 4.º Anos** Seleciona, com apoio, estratégias para realizar uma tarefa simples	**5.º e 6.º Anos** Reconhece, com apoio, estratégias apropriadas à resolução de tarefas relacionadas com situações que lhe são familiares Coloca questões a partir de uma situação ou problema simples e apresenta propostas de resolução de forma orientada
Pensamento crítico e pensamento criativo	**1.º e 2.º Anos** Usa critérios simples que lhe são fornecidos para organizar informação muito simples Envolve-se em tarefas muito simples, manifestando a sua individualidade	**3.º e 4.º Anos** Seleciona, com apoio, ideias e processos simples para executar uma tarefa simples Cria, com apoio, situações para aplicar os seus conhecimentos	**5.º e 6.º Anos** Adequa, com apoio, ideias e processos, a contextos que lhe são familiares. Participa numa discussão orientada e defende as suas ideias, com base em aprendizagens realizadas Cria novas situações com base nos conhecimentos adquiridos, manifestando a sua individualidade
Relacionamento interpessoal	**1.º e 2.º Anos** Ouve os outros, respeitando a sua vez para intervir, utilizando expressões muito simples de convenção social	**3.º e 4.º Anos** Contribui, com apoio, para a execução de uma tarefa comum muito simples, manifestando respeito pelas ideias do outro	**5.º e 6.º Anos** Colabora na realização de uma tarefa aceitando e incorporando ideias diferentes das suas. Participa na resolução de problemas simples, em contexto de sala de aula, e contribuir para a construção de consensos de forma guiada.
Desenvolvimento pessoal e autonomia	**1.º e 2.º Anos** Reconhece, com muito apoio, os pontos fracos e fortes, da sua aprendizagem	**3.º e 4.º Anos** Seleciona, com apoio, formas de ultrapassar obstáculos ou enriquecer as suas aprendizagens	**5.º e 6.º Anos** Reconhece, com apoio, estratégias para aperfeiçoar e ultrapassar desafios de aprendizagem
Bem-estar, saúde e ambiente	**1.º e 2.º Anos** Mantém, com apoio, o seu material e espaço de aprendizagem limpo e organizado	**3.º e 4.º Anos** Apoia na manutenção da limpeza e organização de espaços comuns de aprendizagem. Reconhece, com apoio, hábitos alimentares, de higiene e atividade física que contribuem para o seu bem-estar e o bem-estar dos outros.	**5.º e 6.º Anos** Age, com apoio, de forma a contribuir para o seu bem-estar e bem-estar dos outros.
Sensibilidade estética e artística	**1.º e 2.º Anos** Indica gostos e preferências relativamente a canções, desenhos, imagens, …	**3.º e 4.º Anos** Aprecia, com apoio, alguns aspetos estéticos relacionados com manifestações culturais	**5.º e 6.º Anos** Identifica, com apoio, a importância de aspetos estéticos em contextos que lhes são familiares Incorpora, com apoio, aspetos estéticos (cor, efeitos visuais, movimento, som, etc.), nos trabalhos realizados em formatos diversos.
Saber científico, técnico e tecnológico	**1.º e 2.º Anos** Utiliza, com muito apoio, recursos previamente selecionados	**3.º e 4.º Anos** Utiliza os recursos que estão ao seu dispor de acordo com orientações dadas	**5.º e 6.º Anos** Seleciona, com apoio, os recursos que melhor se adequam ao desenvolvimento do seu trabalho
Consciência e domínio do corpo	**1.º e 2.º Anos** Realiza, com muito apoio, atividades de motricidade fina e de postura corporal, manifestando respeito pelo espaço partilhado	**3.º e 4.º Anos** Estabelece, com apoio, uma relação consigo e com os outros, que contribui para uma boa gestão do espaço de aprendizagem	**5.º e 6.º Anos** Explora, com apoio, experiências motoras que favorecem a aprendizagem

Table 1: *Proposal for the adaptation of PASEO to the 1st and 2nd cycles of Basic Education*

Alongside the proposed operational descriptors for 1st and 2nd Cycles based on the PASEO and to help address assessment policy requirements in *Portaria n.º 223-A/2018, de 3 de agosto,* bands were designed for each communicative language activity, also for a two-year span. Assessment policy requires each school to construct learning

profiles, in accordance with their context, including descriptive performance levels, which integrate both subject-specific knowledge and development of the competence areas in the PASEO. In the *Orientações Curriculares, Inglês, 1.º e 2.º ciclos do ensino básico*, there is a section with performance level bands to aid schools in this endeavour. There is an example below for Oral Comprehension, Reading Comprehension and Written Interaction in years 3 and 4 (Direção Regional da Educação e Administração Educativa, 2022, p. 41). However, in the guidelines you can find performance level bands for all communicative language activities and all grade levels.

NÍVEIS DE DESEMPENHO | 3.º E 4.º ANOS – PreA1 -» A1.1			
NÍVEIS	**COMPREENSÃO ORAL**	**COMPREENSÃO ESCRITA**	**INTERAÇÃO ESCRITA**
MUITO BOM	- Seleciona informação básica; - Identifica frases curtas e simples; - Acompanha diálogos simples; - Acompanha a sequência de histórias ilustradas conhecidas, simples e curtas.	- Identifica palavras e expressões muito familiares; - Reconhece informação em textos factuais / informativos muito curtos; - Descodifica pequenas histórias ilustradas com frases simples e palavras muito familiares; - Seleciona informação em textos muito simples.	- Legenda imagens e/ou sequências de imagens com palavras e expressões simples; - Preenche formulários muito simples ou espaços lacunares em textos muito simples e curtos; - Ordena palavras para elaborar frases simples e curtas; - Utiliza expressões-padrão simples e frases muito simples e curtas para trocar informação básica (*SMS, chat, post...*).
BOM	Nível Intermédio – O aluno apresenta características dos níveis SUFICIENTE e MUITO BOM		
SUFICIENTE	- Seleciona informação muito básica de uma apresentação oral presencial ou em suporte áudio ou audiovisual; - Identifica algumas frases curtas e simples; - Acompanha diálogos muito simples, com trocas de informação simples; - Acompanha o essencial da sequência de histórias ilustradas conhecidas, simples e curtas.	- Identifica palavras simples e algumas expressões muito familiares; - Reconhece alguma informação em textos factuais / informativos muito curtos; - Descodifica o essencial de pequenas histórias situacionais ilustradas com frases simples e palavras muito familiares; - Seleciona informação básica em textos muito simples.	- Legenda algumas imagens e/ou sequências de imagens com palavras simples e expressões simples muito familiares; - Preenche, com algum apoio, formulários muito simples ou espaços lacunares em textos muito simples e curtos; - Ordena algumas palavras para elaborar frases simples e curtas; - Utiliza algumas expressões-padrão simples e frases muito simples e curtas, para trocar informação muito básica (*SMS, chat, post...*).
INSUFICIENTE	- Não seleciona ou raramente seleciona informação mesmo que muito básica de uma apresentação oral presencial ou suporte áudio ou audiovisual; - Não identifica ou raramente identifica frases curtas e simples; - Não acompanha ou raramente acompanha trocas simples de informação; - Não acompanha ou raramente acompanha o essencial da sequência de histórias ilustradas conhecidas, simples e curtas.	- Identifica palavras simples, mas não identifica ou raramente identifica expressões simples; - Não reconhece ou raramente reconhece informação em textos factuais / informativos muito curtos; - Não descodifica ou raramente descodifica pequenas histórias situacionais ilustradas com frases simples e palavras muito familiares; - Não seleciona ou raramente seleciona informação básica em textos muito simples.	- Não legenda ou raramente legenda imagens e/ou sequências de imagens com palavras simples e expressões simples, muito familiares; - Não preenche ou raramente preenche, mesmo com apoio, formulários muito simples ou espaços lacunares em textos muito simples e curtos; - Não ordena ou raramente ordena palavras para elaborar frases simples e curtas; - Não utiliza ou raramente utiliza, mesmo com apoio, expressões-padrão muito simples e frases muito simples e curtas, para trocar informação muito básica (*SMS, chat, post...*).

Table 2: Example of Performance Level Bands

This move towards competence-based learning should foster the development of cognitive skills, language proficiency, and interpersonal and personal growth. In terms of cognitive skills, the move from simpler to more complex language tasks ensures students build critical thinking abilities while mastering English. Language proficiency then follows a cohesive trajectory from basic phonological awareness to contextual communication. Collaboration and self-awareness for interpersonal and personal growth should be emphasised through tasks that require individual creativity and teamwork.

Intentional pedagogical decisions must be made to promote students' learning habits (Claxton, 2002) that enhance the development of the competence areas in the PASEO as well as the English language learning standards. These decisions begin with each teacher gathering information about their learners in relation to their specific subject area. Using this knowledge, which is shared with the rest of the teachers within the

homeroom (*turma*), collective decisions are made. This ensures that all teachers involved are working towards the same global outcomes, regardless of the subject area. In this way a more coherent learning process can be designed, to ensure that learners have various opportunities to master these habits in differentiated contexts, thus facilitating transfer of learning skills. Educators should explore innovative strategies to align, not only English language teaching, but all subjects, with contemporary pedagogical approaches. These should promote the development of competences that work towards a global citizenship, through meaningful learning experiences using strategies and tools to facilitate an assessment that is eminently formative.

3. Designing learning, teaching, and assessment

The intentional pedagogical decisions then lead to intentional action in designing learning, teaching, and assessment. With the PASEO setting the foundation for learning, learners are viewed as social agents (Council of Europe, 2020), which aligns with the action-oriented approach. This perspective emphasises that they are co-constructors of learning, while teachers facilitate this process. They use language as a tool for meaningful interaction in the classroom to rehearse interaction in diverse social environments.

Teachers positioned as facilitators provide tailored support, using various scaffolding strategies, to guide learners through activities. Using the *Backwards Design Theory* (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) helps align the learning sequence with the desired outcomes. Planning starts with defining outcomes and works backward to create relevant learning experiences. This helps both teachers and learners focus on the desired outcomes.

Any structured plan for learning should answer fundamental questions about the process: the *Why? When? What?* and *How?* of learning. *Why?* is the first question to be answered and leads to defining the outcomes to be assessed. *When?* and *What?* probe the gathering of information about the knowledge that will be developed at a specific stage of learning. Finally, the *How?* describes the various learning activities sequenced accordingly, based on the context which encompasses learners' needs and interests. The scheme of work below illustrates what this may look like.

SCHEME OF WORK (SofW)				
ANO:	TEMÁTICA SITUACIONAL:		AULAS PREVISTAS: **B** Quando? SEMANAS:	
PRODUCTIVE LANGUAGE:	*SIGHTWORDS / HF WORDS*		RE	
AULA 45min	OBJETIVOS DE APRENDIZAGEM	ATIVIDADES COMUNICATIVAS	RECURSOS	MONITORIZAÇÃO DAS APRENDIZAGENS
1				No âmbito das Atividades Comunicativas:
2	**C** O que ENSINAR?	**D** Como APRENDER?		**A** AVALIAR Para quê?
3				
4				
5				
6				DESEMPENHO GLOBAL:
7				
FEEDBACK:				

Table 3: Example of Scheme of Work

At a micro level when planning individual lessons, it is important for scaffolding to allow a gradual growth of learners' autonomy making sure that there is a move from lower-order thinking skills to higher-order thinking skills. Unless learners are given space to express themselves and/or take action using what they have learnt, knowledge and skills will not be successfully attained. Figure 1 illustrates this process.
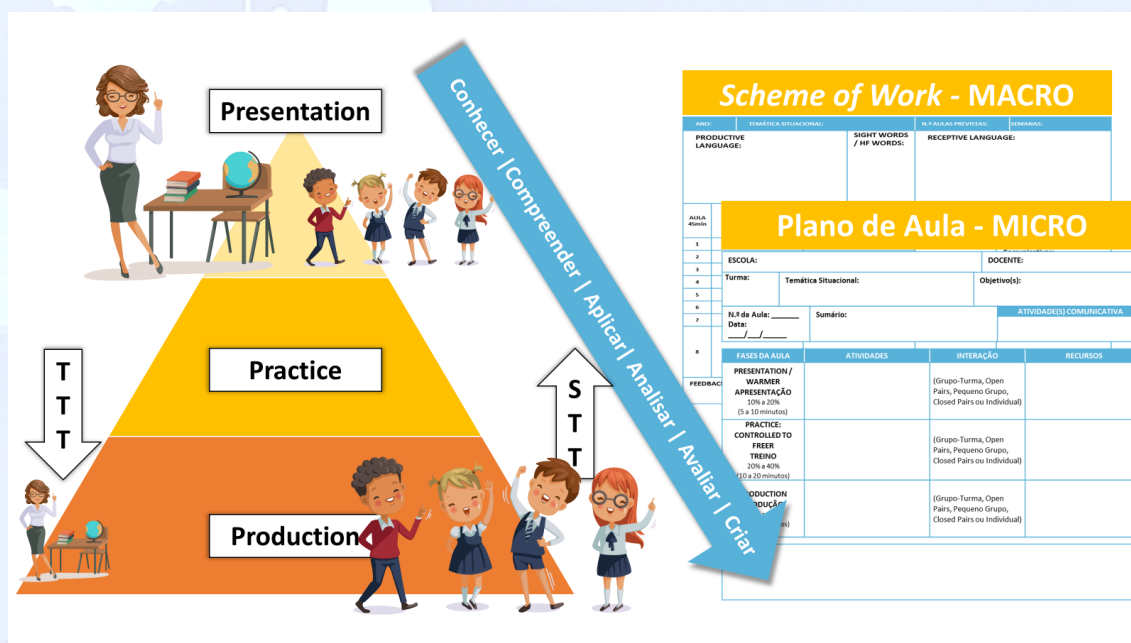

Figure 1: Macro & Micro Planning

To support a pedagogical assessment process for learning, a rubric-based assessment model was created. This type of assessment supports quality feedback, helping students reflect on their learning journey and achieve proficiency milestones for quality outcomes.

The choice for developing what we call "process rubrics" not only assesses the final product(s) of learning, but also monitors it throughout the learning journey. Assessment is then fully integrated into the learning and teaching process. Detailed performance descriptors for both communicative language activities and competence areas of the PASEO ensure consistency and clarity in the assessment process for both learners and teachers. As seen below, this type of rubric incorporates the activities that will be assessed with formative feedback along the way to ensure learners are on the right track or to raise a red flag for teachers to provide the support they need.

NÍVEL DE DESEMPENHO	MONITORIZAÇÃO			ÁREA DE COMPETÊNCIA PA	DESEMPENHO GLOBAL	
	ACTIVIDADES COMUNICATIVAS			Informação e Comunicação	ACTIVIDADES COMUNICATIVAS	
	Compreensão Escrita	Produção Oral	Interação Escrita		Interação Escrita	Interação Oral
Consegue, pode prosseguir	Relaciona todos os alimentos com as respetivas refeições.	Apresenta uma ementa, indicando todos os alimentos / pratos e respetivos preços de forma geralmente inteligível;	Responde todas as questões sobre um diálogo num restaurante	Seleciona, com apoio, toda a informação que necessita para elaborar um produto simples.	Preenche toda a ementa sem imprecisões	**Realiza de um roleplay num restaurante:** - Interage com prontidão sempre - Responde / Reage de forma adequada
Consegue, mas pode melhorar	Relaciona quase todos os alimentos com as respetivas refeições.	Apresenta uma ementa, indicando quase todos os alimentos / pratos e respetivos preços de forma geralmente inteligível;	Responde a quase todas as questões OU Responde a todas as questões, mas com algumas imprecisões	Seleciona, com apoio, quase toda a informação que necessita para elaborar um produto simples.	Preenche quase toda a ementa sem imprecisões OU Preenche toda a ementa com poucas imprecisões	Interage com prontidão sempre e responde / reage de forma adequada, quase sempre OU Interage com prontidão quase sempre e responde / reage de forma adequada, sempre
Consegue com algum apoio	Relaciona alguns alimentos com as respetivas refeições.	Apresenta uma ementa, indicando alimentos / pratos e respetivos preços, mas nem todos de forma geralmente inteligível; ;	Responde a algumas questões OU Responde a quase todas as questões, mas com algumas imprecisões OU Responde a todas as questões com impressões frequentes	Seleciona, com apoio, alguma informação que necessita para elaborar um produto simples.	Preenche quase toda a ementa com poucas imprecisões OU Preenche toda a ementa com algumas imprecisões	Interage com prontidão quase sempre mas nem sempre responde / reage de forma adequada OU Responde / Reage quase sempre de forma adequada, mas nem sempre com prontidão
Ainda não consegue	Não relaciona ou relaciona poucos alimentos com as respetivas refeições.	Apresenta uma ementa, mas não é inteligível ou não apresenta.	Responde com muitas imprecisões ou não responde	Seleciona pouca ou não seleciona a informação, mesmo com apoio .	Preenche a ementa com muitas imprecisões ou não preenche.	Não interage com prontidão, nem responde/reage de forma adequada OU não apresenta o role play

Table 4: Example of Process Rubric

In order to fully support learners and their learning, quality feedback is essential. It must not only feed back but feed up and feed forward, as described by Hattie & Timperley (2007). To make this process more effective, the *Why?* of learning described in the planning structure should be translated and/or transposed into a language that learners are able to grasp. Using a self-assessment tool that provides these three components of feedback aids metacognitive awareness. Promoting reflective practices that gauge not just linguistic skills, but also assess competences holistically, ensures that learners receive actionable feedback that empowers their learning journey. It helps

sustain transfer of learning, namely that which pertains to learning strategies, allowing for more efficient and effective use in new situations. A model is shown below.

Figure 2: Example of Self-Assessment Model

4. Final remarks

The integration of English as a core subject from year 1 of basic education in the Azores has presented both challenges and transformative opportunities. The PASEO represents a call to action: to view all classrooms, not just language classrooms, as a dynamic space for interdisciplinary learning, creativity and global citizenship. It helps language teachers design holistic educational journeys, aligning linguistic goals with competence-based education and lifelong learning principles. Interactive and contextual tasks, which allow for learners to practise English in real-life contexts, not only ensure that they are equipped with the language skills necessary for global interaction, but also foster the critical and social competences needed to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

The central theme here is the philosophical shift from merely educating *for* citizenship to educating *in* citizenship. This holistic approach emphasises experiential learning, where language education serves as a medium to develop active, culturally-aware citizens capable of thriving in diverse global contexts. Through this lens, English becomes more than a language—it is a tool for inclusion, critical thinking, and interpersonal connection.

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A Painting, a Poem, a Movie, a Stamp, and a Smile

A Meaningful Journey

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Abstract

Teachers are immersed in papers, an increasingly bureaucratic environment. It is time to change and to focus on keeping one's work simple, but nevertheless inspiring and motivating. Teachers should engage pupils with meaningful and challenging 'missions'. In this article, teachers will find new resources and new ways of assessing, which will develop life skills, more than just the linguistic ones, and will guide pupils through the learning process. The main aim is to promote quality education and to fight against discrimination, intolerance, and a growing bystander society.

Keywords: arts, poetry, sign language, assessment, emotional intelligence

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1. Introduction

A recent portrayal of students reveals increasing violence and intolerance, lack of motivation in the classroom, as well as lack of objectives or purposes for what they do. On the other hand, a school portrait of the teachers reveals signs of fatigue and burnout; there is too much pressure to fulfil a school curriculum and to develop a series of meaningless projects, as well as a large number of documents to fill in or report. A necessary change must take place, as António Damásio points out:

> . . . I don't see any other way to solve the problem than to value the arts, humanities, and sciences. There are examples in the humanities, such as philosophy in general, in the arts, such as painting, music and literature, that show strong signs of how we can get back on our feet. A form of upliftment other than that which is experienced on the internet, on social networks, in the present moment, which is very disconnected from real life. A principle that certainly applies to the country, just as it possibly applies right now to the whole world, not just the western world . . . (Andrade, 2024)

This article will show how to make the teaching-learning process a meaningful journey for teachers and their learners with new resources and approaches that develop Emotional Intelligence. The journey begins with Education through Art (EtA), moves on to poetry, short films, sign language and ends with a new way of assessing. The ideas described as follows were applied in the 3rd and 4th grade classes in public primary schools. For each suggestion, there is an explanation of **why** it should be considered and **how** it can be applied in the classroom.

2. A painting

2.1 Education through Art (EtA) – Why?

Education through Art relies on the theories of H. Read (2010) and Damásio's (2005) Emotional Intelligence, and it is a necessary approach to change the teaching-learning process. It embraces the aesthetic perspective in an experiential way and bridges with language teaching (expression through words). When applied to younger students, teachers will find its richness and how it connects with the child's creativity and free expression.

2.2 Education through Art (EtA) – How?

The example given to put EtA into practice will be related to visual arts. Apart from paintings, one can choose other works of art. Let's consider the following steps:

STEP 1 - Select a painting that is related to the theme one is teaching.

STEP 2 - Explore the painting, the painter, and its cultural meaning.

STEP 3 - Challenge students to redo the painting according to a new theme or purpose.

STEP 4 - Let them present it to the class – "show and tell".

STEP 5 - Make an exhibition.

Here are some examples of the projects developed on EtA:

A. In this project the painting chosen was "Bedroom in Arles" by Van Gogh. Pupils have learnt about the painter and what a typical house would have looked like at the time. Then they recreated the painting in a different room and presented it to the class. Watch the video at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELnmh7SqP3I

Figure 1: Project "Remaking Van Gogh"

B. As part of the 50th anniversary of democracy and in connection with the EtA project developed in Primary English, 4th grade students were challenged to recreate Picasso's painting 'The Weeping Woman' in a duality of pictures: 'A democratic Picasso portrait *versus* an undemocratic Picasso portrait'. The students were able to express democratic values opposed to anti-democratic values through visual art. The work culminated in the creation of a text for their paintings and their audio recording. This project was integrated into the theme of the human body and senses. The video is available at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hA7TG2Bedl4.

Figure 2: Project "Democracy in Arts"

3. A poem

3.1 From Arts to Poetry – Why?

Through art we can also develop a new form of expression, which is poetry. As Leonardo da Vinci says: "Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt, and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen." Between art and this form of literature there's an umbilical link:

- both embody a creative and metaphorical language.
- both develop critical thinking and emotional intelligence.
- both promote tolerance and open-mindedness.
- both promote self-knowledge and self-esteem.

3.2 From Arts to Poetry – How?

First of all, one needs to consider some resources to guide students through the experience of creative writing as an inner process of self-knowledge. The suggestion is to use a painting and classical music to help students set the environment to create a poem from within. The theme chosen was "Spring":

STEP 1 - Show students Arcimboldo's painting "Spring" and let them look at it in detail and explore their feelings about it (don't mention the name of the painting so that they can freely explore its meaning).

STEP 2 - Play "Spring" (part of "Four Seasons") by Vivaldi and ask students to close their eyes; let them listen and work on their senses (what they hear, taste or smell).

STEP 3 - Finally, ask them to fill in a poem (with guidelines): write, read and... shine.

A poem

it is _____ (season)
What can I say?
You are _____ (colour)
Your face is _____ (feeling)
You sound like _____
You taste like _____
You smell like _____
Oh _____ (season)
Please _____ (stay/go away) !
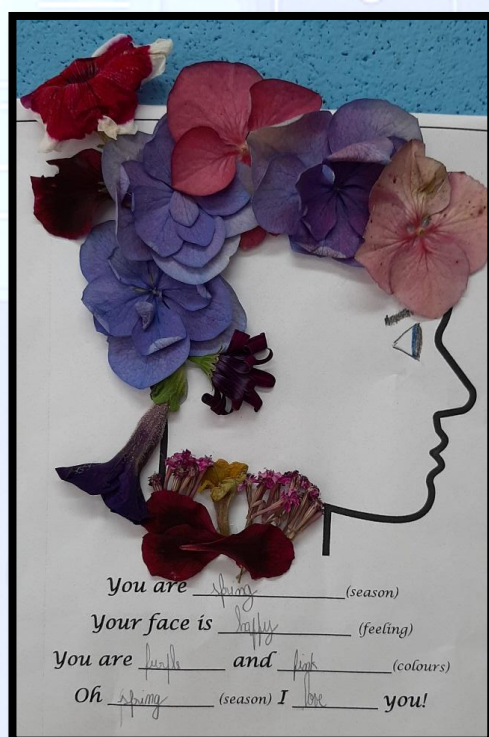
Figure 3: Example of "A poem on Arcimboldo" by a 3rd grade pupil

4. A movie

4.1 Short movie – Why?

Cinema can drive positive change through the ability to evoke deep emotions and create empathy towards a character or situation. A short movie is a powerful resource to use in the classroom for several reasons (Frieden & Elliot, n.d.):

- It encourages emotional and cognitive stimulation.
- It fosters engagement and reflection among students.
- It can be used to deliver social values and understanding.
- It creates a meaningful learning environment.

4.1 Short movie – How?

The most important step is to choose the right short movie. First, it should fit into the theme of the lesson and be contextualized. Then, no less important, it should raise awareness, respect, and meaningful social values.

Once these steps have been taken, it is time to explore the short movie with the students, using a dialogic approach. Ask students to reflect on the message(s) portrayed and get them to use the language to describe scenes, moments, characters, to predict and to share feelings and values. At primary level, you could have the students expressing themselves in their mother tongue and scaffold the use of new vocabulary and structures. Following the theme of the senses and the human body, the short movie suggested is "Senses" by ESMA. It explores disabilities, such as colour blindness and deafness and it raises consciousness of important issues, by telling a story through pictures, colours and sounds. One can watch it at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CeavkO4QOzc

5. A game

5.1 "Talking hands" project – Why?

Over the years, it was possible to acknowledge that learners are more eager to memorize vocabulary and structures when they relate its/their meaning to a gesture, as evidenced by Asher's theories on Learning through Action (1977) and on the Total Physical Response approach (1966). Besides that, we have also verified that through a gamifying approach (Universidade do Porto, n.d.), students are more engaged and motivated in the learning process. Based on these two ideas and considering the importance of selecting resources/activities that promote emotional intelligence and empathy, the project "Talking Hands" was born. The project combines English language acquisition with Portuguese Sign Language. The goal is to help students memorize vocabulary through gestures and at the same time promote inclusive practices by arousing respect and care for deaf people.

5.2 "Talking hands" project – How?

To apply this project in the classroom, teachers must use the Portuguese Sign Language to teach students new vocabulary in English. One can visit the site: www.spreadthesign.com to find more about it.

Then, validate students' knowledge by playing the "Simon says…" game. Use it as a class routine at the beginning of the lesson to revise previously taught content. For example, if the order is "Simon says it is sunny", students should use the gesture for sunny in the Portuguese Sign Language. If the pupil fails the gesture, he/she loses the game. Through this activity, students develop their listening skills and learn other forms of communication. It was interesting to find how many students have deaf people within their families and how this project was so important for them.

6. A stamp

6.1 Assess to learn – Why?

According to Portuguese legislation, students should be involved in the assessment process, but does this really happen? Teachers are immersed in grids and reports to be filled in, and students only have access to the final result. Assessment can be part of the learning process for both students and teachers. The suggestion is to create a daily register that students can have in their notebook. This way, teachers can access the different skills of the students and value daily tasks and challenges more than tests. This new assessment register gives students the opportunity to be aware of their goals or achievements and their needs. It makes assessment a classroom routine and a transversal skill. For the teachers, it simplifies their work because it makes all the variety of grids disappear and merges everything into one: the stamp register.

6.1 Assess to learn – How?

The following steps should be considered when creating a daily assessment register:

STEP 1 - Think of an evaluation code (colours, letters, symbols) and give each code a mark/value (e.g. green is very good).

STEP 2 - Create a register according to what will be accessed and ask students to stick it in their notebook.

STEP 3 - Use this code to give feedback or to evaluate everything they do in class.

STEP 4 - Incorporate different activities and resources into the classroom routine that can be easily assessed.

STEP 5 - Use tasks/challenges to monitor student learning.

STEP 6 - Create a self-assessment grid at the end of the semester/term and let students fill it in themselves according to their 'assessment register'.

Figure 4: Assessment register

7. Concluding with a smile

Through the years and after applying these new approaches and resources in the classroom, it was possible to verify that they had a great impact on students' success and motivation. When they step into the English classroom, they are eager to be challenged and looking forward to receiving a blue stamp (Excellent). They became more focused and open to the learning process. The most interesting fact along this meaningful journey was to acknowledge that, in line with PASEO (2017), students have:

- acquired aesthetic competences.
- developed tolerance, respect, and acceptance for the difference.
- experienced and reflected upon democratic values.
- developed empathy by "putting themselves in other's shoes".
- applied their senses to be creative and to express themselves and their opinions.
- experienced connotative language.
- become more motivated, engaged and self-conscious of their capacities vs difficulties.

I truly believe that they have become more emotionally intelligent and happier. In conclusion, as a pupil has written "Thank you for teaching us with so much, much love, we love you" (Imperatriz, 3rd grade pupil). If a teacher can put a SMILE on a child's face when learning, then our mission is fulfilled. In the words of Paulo Freire (n.d.), teaching is not about transferring knowledge, but creating the possibilities for its own production or construction.

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