

# e-TEALS

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An e-journal of  
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**A**ppplied **L**anguage  
**S**tudies

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An e-journal of **T**eacher **E**ducation and **A**ppplied **L**anguage **S**tudies



## Introduction

Carolyn E. Leslie & Rima J. Prakash | NOVA-FCSH - CETAPS

As language teachers we strive to become better professionals, to better understand our learners, to prepare more engaging lessons and to more effectively meet our students' needs. One way of achieving this is by teachers identifying an area for improvement in their own classrooms, and subsequently carrying out action research (AR), the central idea of which according to Burns (2010, p.2) is:

to intervene in a deliberate way in the problematic situation in order to bring about changes and, even better, improvements in practice. Importantly, the improvements that happen in AR are ones based on information...that an action researcher collects systematically...So, the changes made in the teaching situation arise from solid information rather than from our hunches or assumptions about the way we think things are.

One of the best known models is that of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), who describe AR as consisting of 4 iterative cycles. These are:

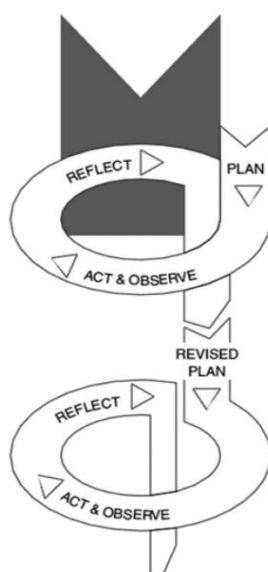


Figure 1. Action Research Cycles (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

During the initial planning stage, a problem, dilemma or puzzle is identified and a plan of action developed. In stage two, the plan is put into action, and in stage three, data is collected on the effects of the plan on teaching and learning. In the final reflection stage, researchers analyse the data gathered and reflect on how this information can help them better understand their initial area of intervention. Much has been published on the value of teacher research, and a recent study has shown a positive relationship between the quality of the inquiry and the quality of teaching (Van Katwijk et al., 2021).

In this volume, three teacher researchers write about their experiences carrying out action research during teacher education programmes. In the first paper Paula Katchi Cravo writes about using formative assessment tools and practices to enhance the writing proficiency of 11<sup>th</sup> year learners. The study was carried out over a 6 month period and involved the use of rubrics, success criteria checklists, teacher feedback through the use of error correction codes and written comments, and learner self-assessment. The second paper by Inês Ribeiro Garcia de Paiva Couceiro focuses on how film can be used in 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle EFL classes to contribute to learners' linguistic and cultural knowledge. Data was gathered through focus groups and post-viewing written assignments. The next paper also discusses an action research project carried out with learners in the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of basic education. Here Pedro M. Lopes describes how he carried out dialogic literary gatherings involving whole-class interaction activities around discussion of classics of world literature, with the objective of investigating how these gatherings fostered opportunities for quality language learning. In our last paper, Carlos Mafra Ceia argues for the need for change within teacher education in Portugal.

We hope this collection of papers sheds light on what can be achieved through action research, and thank our authors for their contributions.

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Assessment for Learning as a Means  
to Promote Students' Writing Proficiency  
Paula Katchi Cravo | NOVA FCSH

**Abstract** | The present study, conducted as part of the practicum during my master's degree in teaching English in the third cycle of basic education and secondary schooling, aimed to enhance students' writing through formative assessment tools and practices. This entailed the use of rubrics, success criteria checklists, students' self-assessment using rubrics, and teacher feedback through error correction codes, comments, and the writing of a second draft by students. The study was conducted during a 6 month period, and involved 21 eleventh-graders. As my research methodology, a small scale classroom-based action research study was implemented, which entailed a qualitative and quantitative approach to data collection. The data collection tools consisted of a teaching journal, questionnaires, and teacher and student assessment of the written tasks through the use of rubrics. The written tasks were an opinion essay and a letter of application. Results showed that students felt motivated to use the formative assessment tools implemented in class. They revealed an ability in self-assessing their work through the use of rubrics, and a capacity to correct their mistakes. The practices implemented in class promoted students' writing proficiency of specific written tasks.

**Keywords** | *assessment for learning (AfL), writing proficiency, formative assessment tools, secondary level*

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## **1 Introduction**

In an increasingly interconnected world, written communication, carried out at a growing speed plays a major role in networking, and in voicing one's opinion in various contexts. My interest in assessment for learning, which aims at improving learning through the use of assessment interconnected to the learning and teaching process related to writing (MacDowell et al., 2009), stems from two main concerns that I have held over my years of teaching. These were my capacity to conduct a lengthy process of correcting students' written work, which involved mainly writing the correct words over students' mistakes, and my perceptions of how much the students really benefitted from that correction. Firstly, the time-consuming task of correcting students' work has led me to provide fewer writing opportunities than my students need. Secondly, I have realized that most of the time, students pay scant attention to the corrections and are mostly concerned with their final qualitative or quantitative grade awarded taking into account their performance in linguistic aspects, organisation and ideas. My concern led me to ponder how to best enhance my students' involvement in their learning process, and how to lead students to benefit from teacher feedback. Furthermore, my belief that writing can and should be taught, and that students should not write without being explicitly taught and given the necessary tools led me to consider ways to guide my students in their writing process. In addition, I gained the belief that the use of appropriate tools would first of all help my learners learn to write different types of texts, and secondly, contribute to a shared responsibility of assessment by teacher and students. Ultimately, I believed the use of selected tools would lead to students' increased writing proficiency.

## **2 Literature Review**

There is extensive literature that indicates that formative assessment is crucial in promoting learning and learners' empowerment and independent learning and thus preparing them to face new challenges in the rapidly changing world. Oscarson

(2009, p.62) advocates that “formative assessment is often referred to as AfL, and is primarily used to improve learning by giving the student information on his or her learning progress while still learning”. In other words, formative assessment offers students the chance to understand their own learning stage. Ramaprasad (cited in Black & William, 2009) refers to the three central processes in which formative assessment is grounded:

- 1- establishing where the learners are in their learning;
- 2- establishing where they are going;
- 3- establishing what needs to be done to get them there.

These processes lead to students' learning while assessment takes place. As pointed out by Black et al. (2003), the term assessment for learning (AfL) has become a usual substitute for formative assessment, and it is defined as “a process, one in which information about learning is evoked and then used to modify the teaching and learning activities in which teachers and students are engaged” (p.122).

Formative assessment is often felt by teachers to be opposite of summative assessment which is “given to determine how much students have learned at a particular point in time, for the purpose of communicating achievement status to others” (Chappuis, 2014, p.4). However, the author demonstrates that formative and summative assessment may work hand in hand. The author points out that prior to summative assessment the same task can be used formatively. For example, when a student performs a writing task that is submitted to the teacher, who provides feedback, and this is followed by the students' revision and final submission (p.5).

The above rationale seems to have been incorporated into Portuguese educational policies, which in recent years have gradually emphasized the relevance of the learning process over the final product. The National Programme for English in the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> years (Moreira et al., 2001/2003) recommends the use of “different assessment modes, such as self-assessment, peer assessment, diagnostic assessment, summative assessment, and above all, formative assessment” (p.44, my translation). These suggested practices are varied, giving the teacher the opportunity to use different assessment tools. In line with the

official document referred to above, the MAIA project (*Monitoring and research project in pedagogical assessment*) discusses pedagogical assessment in Portuguese schools, and mentions the importance of the use of formative assessment and the active participation of the students in the learning process (Fernandes et al., 2020). Black and Wiliam (2009) further point out that the teacher, the peer and the learner share responsibilities in the learning process as “the teacher is responsible for designing and implementing an effective learning environment and the learner is responsible for the learning within that environment” (p.4).

The process approach to writing entails the students' focus on the process, while they carry out their written tasks, rather than on the products themselves (Onozawa, 2010), offering thus the chance of continuous improvement, by going back and forth, on the same piece of writing, before its final stage. Afl and the process approach to writing are combined in the present study, since writing was assessed at different stages and its purpose was to support learning.

Cope and Kalatziz (personal communication, December, 2021) seem to foresee assessment as a natural element, always present in the classroom. Moreover, assessment should, according to the authors, be intertwined in instruction, pointing thus to assessment with its various tools- functioning as a means to learning.

Formative assessment “can be a powerful weapon to create a “culture of success” in the classroom, negating low self-esteem, low self-efficacy and inadequate learning approaches so that all students are able to achieve” (Oscarson, 2009, p. 62), since students understand what they need to do to progress in a positive learning environment, in which teacher and students share responsibility in the students' learning process.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Writing Proficiency**

"How can assessment for learning promote students' writing proficiency?" is the main research question of the study. The aim of the research was to conduct an action research study over a period of five months in the academic year 2021-2022, to improve the writing proficiency of a group of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students, through the implementation of AfL. The study aimed to use tools that were associated with AfL, which could ultimately develop students' written skills.

Eleventh-grade English teaching should correspond to B2 level of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2020) according to the *Aprendizagens Essenciais / Articulação com o perfil dos alunos (Essential Learning/ Articulation with the students' profile)* (Direção Geral da Educação, 2018). According to the Council of Europe (2020), written production at B2 level entails creative writing, report writing and essays. Written interaction, on the other hand, involves similar language to oral language and encompasses two scales, "correspondence", which is centred on interpersonal exchange and "notes, messages and forms" that entail information transfer (p.83). In addition, the CEFR (2020) presents descriptor scales for the following aspects of communicative language competences: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. Firstly, linguistic competence includes such aspects which are important for writing, these being "general linguistic range", "vocabulary range", "grammatical accuracy", "vocabulary control" and "orthographic control". Secondly, sociolinguistic competence refers to "sociolinguistic appropriateness". Lastly, pragmatic competence includes, among other aspects, "coherence and cohesion", which are other aspects undoubtedly relevant in writing. Students' English writing proficiency indicated in the present study corresponded to students' ability to use the written English language effectively taking into account the official documents referred to above. The categories included in the rubrics took into consideration these aspects.

**3.2 Research Tools**

The relevant tools for the present study were:

a) use of success criteria guidelines, and success criteria checklist. This is, the teacher's clarification of learning intentions, and a way for learners to check they have included the necessary criteria.

b. 1) use of rubrics for students' self-assessment of their first draft and use of the same rubrics by the teacher to assess students' written work. The use of rubrics aimed at helping students to understand what they should do to improve their work. Students were encouraged to check if their work contained what was described in each category of the rubrics and then to improve in the areas needed. For the students' self-assessment I added the students' numerical grades attributed by themselves of all categories and divided by the number of categories to achieve the average result of students' self-assessment. Then, I added the self-assessors' numerical grades and I divided it by the number of self-assessors to find out about the students' self-assessment in each category.

b.2) the teacher's use of the rubrics to assess students aimed at understanding what areas students were the most successful and those students needed more support. Lastly, the use of rubrics was crucial to collect data. For teacher teacher's assessment, I added the students' numerical grades attributed by the teacher of all categories and divided by the number of categories to achieve the average that each student received over the marks they receive for each category. Secondly, I added the students' numerical grades by category and divided it by the number of participants to obtain the teacher's assessment in each category. The results were expressed in percentage.

c) the teacher's feedback, through the use of comments and error correction codes, which is essential for facilitating students' understanding of where they are in their learning stage and how they can improve their work.

The teacher's feedback provided qualitative data analysed in the study. Data collection was based on the correction of both students' drafts, questionnaires and a teaching journal. The analysis of quantitative data was expressed as percentages, and the analysis of qualitative data entailed categorization.

### **3.3 Context**

The study involved a group of twenty-one 11<sup>th</sup> grade students from a private school located on the outskirts of Lisbon. The students had two ninety-minute English classes per week. This group of students were considered motivated to learn, and academically competitive and successful by their teachers. The students were described by their English teacher as being highly interested in technology and mathematics, and less interested in the humanities.

### **3.4 The Procedures Used**

The action research involved the writing of two written assignments, in accordance with the school curricula, with success criteria guidelines and success criteria checklist for each class. It also involved the use of teacher assessment of the written texts using rubrics (Appendices A and B), class feedback and feedforward through PowerPoint slides and individual feedback through the use of an error correction code (Appendix C).

Lastly, students wrote the second draft of each written assignment using the error correction code and their peers' help, and resubmitted the text to the teacher. The procedures described fit into the AfL framework, in which learners and the teacher share responsibility in the learning process.

## **4 Results**

### **4.1 Written Task 1: An Opinion Essay**

In February the eleventh-grade students were asked to write their first written task, which preceded the writing of an opinion essay in their written test. They were provided with the success criteria guidelines and the success criteria checklist appropriate to the task.

#### 4.1.1 Class Feedback on Draft 1 of the Opinion Essay.

Class feedback through PowerPoint slides was provided to the students before the teacher handed back students' work. The rubrics (Appendix A) were displayed in the slides and explained to students. Examples of the most successful categories in the rubrics were identified and shared with the students. In addition, the categories that most needed improvement were shown. Register was not included as a category in the rubrics. However, my correction of the students' written tasks led me to later include it as a category. In fact, "Students' use of very informal expressions in formal texts such as *a lot*, and *way higher* surprised me". (My teaching journal, 17/02/2021).

Students were reminded through a PowerPoint slide not to use phrasal verbs, to think about complex words to substitute less complex ones, use more formal connectors, and finally use the passive voice.

#### 4.1.2 Results and Discussion of Task 1.

The students were provided with the success criteria guidelines to help them plan their task, and also with the success criteria checklist to their work.

**Table 1.** *Difference between teacher's assessment and self-assessment in the different categories of the rubric for essay of opinion*

Categories of the rubrics					
Results expressed in percentage	Position statement	Evidence and examples	Sentence structure	Grammar and spelling	Closing paragraph
Teacher	86	84	67	72	66
Students	92	84	73	72	70
Difference	6	0	6	0	4

Results shown indicate that teacher and students agreed on the assessment of *evidence and examples* and *grammar and spelling*. Concerning the other categories, the difference between the teacher's assessment and the students' self-assessment was not significant, which seems to demonstrate students' ability to

self-assess their work through the use of the tools provided (calculation explained in section 3.2). The self-assessment skill plays a central role in the development of learner autonomy, in which students play an active role in their learning.

#### **4.1.3 Personalised Feedback through the Use of the Error Correction Codes. individual Feedback, and Writing of the Second Draft of the Opinion Essay.**

The students were given the error correction code and were asked to correct the first draft of their written assignment. The first sample of this assignment demonstrated use of informal language, for example: "From my point of view, nations that have more money are usually the one involved in worldwide problems, so in general I agree with this statement." The second draft demonstrated how the student's managed to overcome the problems of the first draft, "From my point of view, wealthier nations are the ones involved in worldwide problems, so in general I agree that richer nations are the ones responsible for problems around the world".

As well as language, content was also considered by the teacher. In the sample transcribed below, the student's perspective seemed somewhat biased.

A study made in 2016 by EDGAR (Emission Database for Global Atmospheric Research informed us that the top 3 countries that pollute the most are China, the USA and India, two of them being poor countries. In 2016, China had approximately 1,4 billion people and it emitted approximately 10 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. India, another big country, emitted 2 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub>.

The teacher encouraged the student to include the perspective of the poor countries through the question written on the student's text: "don't India and China produce goods to be sent to wealthy countries?" The student was therefore able to state his opinion with greater maturity and respect for the poor countries. The second draft is transcribed below:

A study made in 2016 by EDGAR (Emission Database for Global Atmosphere Research) showed us that the top 3 countries that pollute the most are China, the USA and India, two of these being poor countries. Although these two countries export products to richer countries, they are still producing tons of trash that pollute our planet every day.

In the second draft, the student did not include the data he had included in the first draft. In fact, although his research helped him shape his opinion, the figures were not essential to write an opinion essay, as the student came to realise.

#### **4.1.4 Teacher's Assessment of Second Draft and Comparison with the First Draft.**

Writing the second draft is not a widespread practice, especially among older students, and even less so during lessons. However, a positive learning environment could be observed when students were writing their second draft in class:

"See how focused they are in correcting their work. They are aware of what they need to correct. It's a pity that we don't have time to do this every time", said my cooperating teacher. (My teaching journal, 22/02/ 2022).

**Table 2** *Difference between teacher's assessment of the first and the second draft in the different categories of the rubric for the opinion essay*

Results in percentage	Draft 1	Draft 2
Position statement	85	99
Evidence and examples	84	97
Sentence structure	63	91
Grammar and spelling	72	93
Closing paragraph	65	82

In fact, and as expected, the outcome of the calculations explained in section 3.2 of the present study showed that in all the categories of the rubrics the students scored higher results in their second drafts. *Sentence structure*, which had been identified as the least successful of the areas improved greatly, and also the *closing paragraph* was significantly better in the students' second drafts.

#### **4.1.5 Distribution of the First Questionnaire to the Eleventh-grade Students.**

In March, after writing the first draft of their opinion essay, followed by self-assessment and writing of their second draft, questionnaire 1 was distributed.

Firstly, I aimed at understanding how students used the tools provided. The results below (Table 3) confirmed that a high number felt that the success criteria guidelines helped them stay focused on their writing task (question 1) and also helped them plan their written task (question 3). However, for 33 percent the success criteria guidelines could limit their ideas (question 2). Concerning the use of the checklist, it seems that most students who used it, did so when they finished writing (question 4) and not while they were writing (question 5). Indeed, learning strategies varied among students who achieved similar results, and therefore the use of the checklist at the end or while they were writing did not seem to cause an impact on results.

**Table 3** Students' use of the tools provided during their writing process (21 respondents)

Students' answers converted in percentage	Not true	Somewhat true	neutral	true	Very true
1. The success criteria guidelines helped me stay focused in my writing task.	0	11	11	<b>39</b>	<b>39</b>
2. The success criteria guidelines limited my ideas in my writing task.	11	<b>33</b>	39	11	6
3. The success criteria guidelines helped me plan my writing task.	0	6	17	<b>28</b>	<b>50</b>
4. I read the success criteria guidelines when I finished writing.	22	17	6	<b>22</b>	<b>33</b>
5. I ticked the items in the checklist while I was writing.	<b>33</b>	17	28	11	11

In the present study it was relevant to understand students' perception of the feedback provided on their written tasks (Table 4).

**Table 4** Students' perception of feedback

Students' answers converted in percentage	Not true	Somewhat true	neutral	true	Very true
1. Individual feedback helped me understand how to improve writing opinion essays.	6	0	8	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>
2. Correction codes helped me to understand my mistakes.	0	6	7	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
3. Correction codes made me confused.	0	2	7	0	<b>1</b>

The students viewed individual feedback as a helpful tool to improve their writing of opinion essays (Question 1). However, results showed that the error correction codes had a greater role in helping students understand their mistakes (Question 2). For almost 75 percent of students the error correct codes were not confusing and only 11 percent agreed with the statement (Question 3).

The analysis of the open question, aimed at understanding which type of feedback students preferred among class feedback, individual feedback and error correction codes, showed that over 50 percent of the students preferred individual feedback because it helped them understand their mistakes and improve their writing. The use of corrections was the main means used in individual feedback and it seems that a more regular use of these could lead to students' greater efficiency in using them, more satisfaction and enhanced development.

**Table 5** Students' use of rubrics

Students' answers converted in percentage					
	Not true	Somewhat true	neutral	true	Very true
1. Rubrics helped me to self-assess my opinion essay.	0	7	7	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>
2. Rubrics helped me to understand what I need to do to improve when I write opinion essays.	0	6	7	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>
3. Rubrics are useful to understand what grade I will get in an opinion essay.	6	7	<b>3</b>	3	1
4. Rubrics make me anxious about my performance.	0	7	2	6	6

Results displayed in table 5 show that 67 percent of students considered the use of rubrics helpful to self-assess their opinion essay (Question 1) and 78 percent believed that the use of rubrics helped them understand what they needed to do to improve their written task (Question 2). Over 30 percent were not certain whether the use of rubrics would help them to understand the grade they would have in their opinion essay (Question 3). Probably, the time gap between the writing of the essay and the filling of the questionnaire played its part by contributing to students' forgetfulness. Interestingly, the use of rubrics brought some students a degree of anxiety about their performance (Question 4).

#### **4.2 Written Task 2. A Letter of Application**

In March students were asked to write their second written task, a letter of application. Once more the students were provided with the success criteria guidelines to help them plan their task, and also with the success criteria checklist.

##### **4.2.1 Class Feedback on Draft 1 of Students' Letter of Application.**

Class feedback through PowerPoint slides was provided to the students before handing back their work. The rubrics were shown in the slides and explained. *Salutation and closing* in formal emails/letters was a successful area. However, it

was relevant to clarify the students who had not followed the conventions fully. In addition, it seemed pertinent to present samples of good arguments used by the students because their lack of work experience was a fact that needed to be considered.

#### 4.2.2 Results of Written Task 2. A Letter of Application.

The analysis that follows was based on the teacher's assessment and the students' self-assessment of the first draft of the written task, and before students' corrected their work using the correction code. The assessment was carried out through the use of rubrics (Appendix 2) that included the following categories: *Salutation and closing, grammar and spelling, sentences and paragraphs, format, and register.*

**Table 6** *Difference between teacher's assessment and self-assessment in the different categories of the rubric for the letter of application*

Results expressed in percentage	Categories of the rubrics				
	Salutation and closing	Grammar and spelling	Sentences and paragraphs	Format	Register
Teacher	84	85	90	87	93
Students	81	82	78	81	84
Difference	3	3	12	6	9

The assessment of the category of *sentences and paragraphs* seemed the most dissimilar. Interestingly, in all the categories the teacher's assessment was more favourable than the students' self-assessment, which could stem from the fact that this group of students was considered highly competitive and rigorous in the different subject areas by their different teachers (calculation explained in section 3.2). The students used self-assessment as a tool to support their learning process and the results seemed to indicate that assessment for learning promoted students' writing proficiency.

**4.2.3 Personalized Feedback through the Use of the Error Correction Codes and Writing of the Second Draft of the Letter of Application.**

The students were asked to correct the first draft of their written assignment, using the error correction code. As shown earlier, the results of the assignment were significantly above average in all categories of the rubrics.

The selection of the samples of the letter of application aimed to illustrate a student's success in writing his second draft, in terms of organisation. In fact, in the first sample the sports mentioned by the student were dispersed in the text, which affected the organisation of paragraphs, as illustrated in the sample transcribed below:

I think I am suitable for the role because I can speak different languages and I can play sports and even swim if necessary. I enjoy working with young people and if possible I could introduce ideas for new activities in the camp. As said before I am capable to play many different sports. For example, football, basketball, water polo, handball and volleyball.

As shown below, in draft 2 the student was able to improve the organisation of his ideas. That is, the student listed the sports he did in a systematized manner and deleted the irrelevant words and expressions, which led him to improve the coherence of his text, notwithstanding the linguistic problems. The text is transcribed below:

I am writing to apply for the role of summer camp leader.  
I think I am suitable for the role because I have worked as a camp leader before in my home country.  
Not only that I can speak three different languages and I can play sports as for example, football, swimming, basketball, water polo, handball and volleyball. In addition, I can play the guitar.  
I look forward to hearing from you soon.

As shown, the inversion using "not only" needed to be corrected. Thus, writing was considered a process aimed at improvement, and assessment aimed at helping students to develop their writing skills.

#### 4.2.4 Teacher's Assessment of Second Draft and Comparison with the First Draft.

*Grammar and spelling* were the categories in which a greater difference between the two drafts was perceived. Students were able to correct their language mistakes, using the error correction codes, their mobile phones to search for the information they needed, and their peers' help. Students were competent in making the necessary changes in order to develop the format of their texts as can be seen in Table 7.

**Table 7** *Difference between teacher's assessment of the first and the second draft in the different categories of the rubric for the letter of application*

Results in percentage	Draft 1	Draft 2
Salutation and closing	84	97
Grammar and spelling	85	99
Sentences and paragraphs	90	96
Format	87	96
Register	93	97

The *salutation and closing* greatly improved. Students had received straightforward instructions regarding this category, which they had not fully followed. Once they received the feedback, they self-corrected this writing area. In all, and not surprisingly, students' upgraded writing in their second drafts was revealed in each category of the rubrics, as shown above.

#### 4.2.5 Distribution of the Second Questionnaire.

In April the 11<sup>th</sup> grade students responded to the second questionnaire which aimed at understanding students' views on the effectiveness of the tools adopted during the development of their written tasks.

Results shown (Table 8) indicate that over 50 percent of the students considered that the success criteria guidelines helped them stay focused on their writing task (Question 1) and helped them plan their writing task (Question 3).

However, nearly 40 percent of the students thought that the success criteria guidelines limited their ideas (Question 2). Nevertheless, a similar number of students read the success criteria guidelines when they finished writing their text (question 6), which shows that they read the success criteria guidelines throughout their writing and read them at the end too (Questions 4 and 5).

**Table 8** Students' use of the tools provided during their writing process

Students' answers converted in percentage					
	Not true	Somewhat true	neutral	true	Very true
1. The success criteria guidelines helped me stay focused on my writing task.	0	13	13	<b>38</b>	<b>21</b>
2. The success criteria guidelines limited my ideas in my writing task.	4	17	25	<b>25</b>	<b>13</b>
3. The success criteria guidelines helped me plan my writing task.	0	4	13	<b>54</b>	<b>13</b>
4. I read the success criteria guidelines several times throughout my writing.	13	8	21	<b>17</b>	<b>25</b>
5. I read the success criteria guidelines when I finished writing.	21	13	17	<b>25</b>	<b>13</b>
6. I ticked the items in the checklist while I was writing.	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	4	21	13
7. I ticked the items in the checklist after finishing writing.	13	13	17	<b>8</b>	<b>33</b>

Nearly 50 percent of the students did not tick the items in the checklist while they were writing (Question 6), and 33 percent ticked the items after finishing writing (Question 7). In total 83 percent claimed they ticked the checklist at some point, which seems to indicate their interest in the tool provided.

Students' perception of feedback is illustrated below (Table 9). Over 50 percent of the respondents thought that class feedback and individual feedback helped them to improve their letters of application (Questions 1 and 2) and 46 percent considered that correction codes helped them understand their mistakes (Question 3). However, nearly 40 percent thought that the correction codes made them confused (Question 4). Possibly, students would have needed some training, which I was not aware of. I had shown the error correction code to the students and had briefly explained the meanings of the symbols which I assumed was sufficient.

**Table 9** *Students' perception of feedback*

Students' answers converted in percentage	Not true	Somewhat true	neutral	true	Very true
1. Class feedback helped me understand how to improve writing letters of application.	3	4	3	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>
2. Individual feedback helped me understand how to improve letters of application.	4	0	5	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
3. Correction codes helped me to understand my mistakes.	0	7	1	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
4. Correction codes made me confused.	7	1	8	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>

Outcomes shown below (Table 10) illustrate students' perception of the use of rubrics. 46 percent considered that the rubrics helped them to self-assess their letter of application (Question 1).

**Table 10** Students' use of rubrics

Students' answers converted in percentage	Not true	Somewhat true	neutral	true	Very true
1. Rubrics helped me to self-assess my letter of application.	4	7	7	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>
2. Rubrics helped me to understand what I need to do to improve when I write a letter of application.	4	0	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>
3. Rubrics are useful to understand what grade I will get in a letter of application.	3	8	1	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>

34 percent of the students thought that the use of rubrics helped them understand what they needed to do in order to improve their writing task, whereas nearly 50 percent were not so sure about its usefulness (Question 2). Interestingly, a similar number of respondents considered it useful to understand what grade they would get in a letter of application, in a summative evaluation.

#### **4.3 Summary of Results of Written Task 1 and Written Task 2**

In the written tasks, spelling and grammar mistakes were those students were best able to overcome when they wrote a second draft, possibly because the information needed could be accessed easily and their correction tended to be straightforward. The more specific aspects of the task, such as *position statement* in opinion essays and *salutations and closing* for letter of application were also areas in which students overcame their misunderstandings, presumably due to unambiguous models provided, which they looked at more carefully when they wrote their second drafts. The number of students who considered that the success criteria guidelines helped them to stay focused on their task decreased by almost 30 percent, and the number who thought that the success criteria guidelines had helped them plan their writing task also decreased, but not so significantly. This may be attributed to a greater self-confidence achieved by

students who adopted a more risk-taking attitude when they wrote the second task. The practices carried out included the integration of various assessment tools, whose primary role was helping students to improve their writing.

## **5 Final Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to promote students' writing proficiency through AfL. The study involved a group of eleventh-grade students. Two written tasks were completed, various assessment tools were used, and students' responses to the tasks as well as to questionnaires were analysed within the scope of the present study.

Direct support was provided to students for improving their writing, but also the students' role was crucial in their assessment process, which is in agreement with the characterisation of AfL suggested by Siarova et al. (2017). Moreover, students were provided with information on their accomplishment while they were learning, which is in line with Oscarson's (2009) definition of formative assessment.

A significant number of students considered that class feedback, as well as individual feedback through an error correction code, helped them understand how to improve their writing tasks. In fact, Siarova et al. (2017) stresses the teachers' key role in providing feedback and in setting goals in AfL. Moreover, effective feedback is a tool in AfL, which supports students' learning (Vogt and Froelich, cited in Tsagari et al, 2018). Individual feedback, provided mostly through the use of correction codes was considered effective by the students in helping them develop their writing. In line with this outcome, Black et al. (2003) refer to a study that aimed at understanding the efficacy of different types of feedback, which concluded that learning gains were greatest for those students who were given only comments with no grades.

Interestingly, it seems that, although some students found error correction codes confusing, they tried to overcome their doubts, by seeking clarification. As suggested by Boshier (1990), students "were engaged in a problem-solving approach to error" (p.88). Indeed, this group of students, being science and maths oriented, and thus challenged by quantitative calculations and logical reasoning, could be

highly motivated to use the error correction codes. In addition, the students regarded the rubrics helpful to self-asses their written task, as suggested by Goodrich (1996), and to understand what they needed to do to improve their texts.

In all, results confirmed the students' reflection during their learning process and the development of their writing proficiency. The students' learning process entailed students knowing where they were in their learning stage, where they were going and what they needed to do to reach their goals. In the final stage of the action research students' written texts revealed significantly fewer language problems and the acquisition of the correct requirements for each task. That is, students were able to produce an essay, in which they gave reasons to justify their point of view, and they were able to respond to an advert through writing, which are aims described by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2020). Assessment for learning implemented during my practicum, which involved the use of various assessment tools, described in this study, promoted students' writing proficiency of specific written tasks.

Future study could involve students and the English teacher in collaborative co-construction of the writing rubrics and giving learners guided practice in using the rubrics.

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**Appendix A Rubric for written task 1 for the eleventh-grade:  
opinion essay**

Generated by *Rubistar* and adapted

CATEGORY	Sophisticated	Competent	Partly competent	Not yet competent
<b>Position Statement</b>	The position statement provides a clear, strong statement of the author's position on the topic.	The position statement provides a clear statement of the author's position on the topic.	A position statement is present, but does not make the author's position clear.	There is no position statement.
<b>Evidence and Examples</b>	All of the evidence and examples are specific, relevant and explanations are given that show how each piece of evidence supports the author's position.	Most of the evidence and examples are specific, relevant and explanations are given that show how each piece of evidence supports the author's position.	At least one of the pieces of evidence and examples is relevant and has an explanation that shows how that piece of evidence supports the author's position.	Evidence and examples are NOT relevant AND/OR are not explained.
<b>Sentence Structure</b>	All sentences are well-constructed with varied structure.	Most sentences are well-constructed and there is some varied sentence structure in the essay.	Most sentences are well constructed, but there is no variation in structure.	Most sentences are not well-constructed or varied.
<b>Grammar &amp; Spelling</b>	Author makes just some errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Author makes a few errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Author makes many errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Author makes many errors in grammar or spelling that hinder the reader's comprehension
<b>Closing paragraph</b>	The conclusion is strong and leaves the reader solidly understanding the writer's position. Effective restatement of the position statement begins the closing paragraph.	The conclusion is recognizable. The author's position is restated within the first two sentences of the closing paragraph.	The author's position is restated within the closing paragraph, but not near the beginning.	There is no conclusion - the paper just ends.

**Appendix B Rubric for written task 2 for the eleventh-grade: Letter of application**

Generated by *Rubistar* and adapted

CATEGORY	Sophisticated	Competent	Partly competent	Not yet competent
<b>Salutation and Closing</b>	Salutation and closing have no errors in capitalization and punctuation.	Salutation and closing have 1-2 errors in capitalization and punctuation.	Salutation and closing have 3 or more errors in capitalization and punctuation.	Salutation and/or closing are missing.
<b>Grammar &amp; spelling (conventions)</b>	Writer makes minor errors in grammar or spelling that don't distract the reader from the content	Writer makes some errors in grammar and/or spelling that don't distract the reader from the content	Writer makes many errors in grammar and/or spelling that don't distract the reader from the content	Writer makes many errors in grammar and/or spelling that hinder the reader's understanding.
<b>Sentences &amp; Paragraphs</b>	Sentences and paragraphs are complete, well-constructed and of varied structure.	All sentences are complete and well-constructed (no fragments, no run-ons). Paragraphing is generally done well.	Most sentences are complete and well-constructed. Paragraphing needs some work.	Many sentence fragments or run-on sentences OR paragraphing needs lots of work.
<b>Format</b>	Complies with all the requirements for an application letter.	Complies with almost all the requirements for an application letter.	Complies with several of the requirements for an application letter.	Complies with less than 50% of the requirements for an application letter.
<b>Register</b>	The author uses long forms and formal words/expressions consistently.	The author uses mostly long forms and formal words/expressions.	The author uses mostly long forms.	The author uses short forms-

**Appendix C Error correction code**

Error correction codes	
sp	spelling
V	verb tense / verb form
prep	incorrect preposition
pl	singular/plural
ww	wrong word
G	grammar mistake
wo	wrong word order
pro	incorrect pronoun
frag	fragment (incomplete sentence)
ns/	start a new sentence here
?	unclear
∧	add word/s
del	delete
0	problem with punctuation
□	use a better word
H	messy handwriting
rep	repetition
~~~~~	the sentence is confusing

The Filmic text in the English Foreign Language classroom:  
Contributing to students' language & culture  
Inês R.G. de Paiva Couceiro | NOVA FCSH

**Abstract** | This article analyses how an approach centred on the filmic text in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom contributes to the learners' linguistic and cultural knowledge, as part of an action-research project carried out during the 2021/2022 school year in Sintra, Portugal. For the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, lessons were created to include the use of a film, which dealt with the topic of the unit. Each lesson worked on different skills, with a wide range of activities that aimed at developing students' language and culture. At the end of each course unit, focus groups were conducted and written assignments were submitted. This facilitated the development of further lesson plans which catered for students' needs and promoted language learning. Results show that learners' participation in class increased both in quantity and in quality, as their discussions became more detail-oriented and included film analysis vocabulary and cultural meaning construction, thus revealing a growing cultural awareness when linking or contrasting the different cultures shown on screen with their own. All in all, the use of film in these EFL classrooms contributed to the learners' linguistic and cultural learning process.

**Keywords** | Filmic text; EFL classroom; languaculture

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## **1 Introduction**

Considering Viebrock's (2016) take on the filmic text as the combination of an analytical approach to details and a holistic perspective of the meaning of films in an educational setting, learners' ability "to decode and produce all kinds of visual images and all kinds of combinations of different semiotic systems" (p.13), its potential in the classroom has long been underrated. According to Edgar et al. (2015), film is analysable as text because it integrates written, audio and visual texts, with the further advantage of being an authentic material. In the case of films there is great potential, and whether learners can actively engage with the language and culture from the film is an issue that has been discussed, with studies showing that film may have a place in the classroom as a means to develop knowledge, particularly when considering it as a multimodal text, where more than one mean is needed to fully understand and engage with it.

As part of a Master's in Teaching, I was required to observe two classes for five months and during that period, three main issues arose: 1) the participation rates were very low (both in spoken and in written activities); 2) learners would become excited when shown scenes from films, but no activities were developed afterwards to analyse or discuss them; 3) it was not clear to students what they could gain from interpreting a film. Bringing these three issues centre stage, the research question then was 'How may filmic text contribute to learners' language and cultural acquisition?' The point was to analyse how, after surpassing the issue of getting their attention, film as a multimodal text and its analysis could benefit how students perceived language learning and how it was a source of cultural discussion.

All lessons entailed the analysis of an excerpt from a film, which was specifically chosen to fit the topic of the unit at hand. The analysis focused on different skills, with an attempt to showcase how one teaching resource, (the film), could be the foundation for all skills to be developed. There was a particular emphasis on speaking, considering that the progression of the tasks relied heavily

on students' input. Specific writing structures were revised, as were grammar rules, and then used as the form of a response to the events of the film.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Film as a Multimodal Text**

Film and filmic text entail the understanding of film in its narrative form, that is, depicting a story told by the characters (Manchel, 1990), and not videos developed with language and teaching as a *leitmotif*. Wildfeuer (2017) further suggests that the construct "film as text today" is bridging "the gap between general approaches to film interpretation (...) and modern linguistic analysis of how meaning in multimodal texts is created" (p.1). The concept of multimodality refers to texts which combine more than one mode, such as written, spoken and paralinguage, still and moving image, audio and spatial meaning (Steckmest, 2021). Films use more than one mode at a time, thus making them multimodal texts. Moreover, meaning in film derives from an interplay which results "in a narrative text whose comprehension and interpretation requires the spectator's active participation" (Wildfeuer, 2017, p.1).

This concept of active viewing involves "scaffolding, focal attention, critical thinking, and participation" (Steckmest, 2021, p.12). If literacy is based on the learner's ability to effectively communicate because they can speak, read and write, then multiliteracies refer to the ability to communicate effectively in more than one mode. Students can then develop their linguistic and cultural skills so their meaning-making abilities further evolve.

The permeation of screens in learners' lives has led to the EFL classroom becoming a context where students engage with each other and where English is used to build meaning (Porto, 2018), consequently acquiring greater linguistic proficiency whilst developing Byram's concept of critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) (Byram, 1997), which promotes learners' ability to critically evaluate different cultures, including their own.

**2.1.1 Film in the EFL Classroom.**

The use of film in the EFL classroom is supported by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Language – Companion Volume (CEFR-CV)* (Council of Europe, 2020) in the category of audio-visual perception. For instance, at B1 level, learners are expected to follow films in which visuals and action carry much of the storyline (Council of Europe, 2020), hence the importance of choosing an adequate film. There is also evidence in the updated CEFR-CV of an increasing awareness of the link between language and culture where useful intercultural descriptors are provided.

Bearing this in mind, films take on a pivotal role in the EFL classroom, as they also have the potential of allowing for a representation of the real world. This authenticity, not only in the cultural representations and setting choices, but also in the dialogues, is discussed by Legutke (2012), who identifies three features that make films authentic texts: they enable learners to explore their own life in a “nonthreatening way” (p.115); this distance between the learners and the characters may help them develop a deeper understanding towards others, and this requires learners to reflect upon and express their perspectives in spoken and written texts, thus articulating their linguistic knowledge to participate.

Kaiser (2011) adds that this knowledge can be developed at three different levels: “films can serve as a model of language use” (p.241), as vehicles of cultural information and as an “exploration of how multiple semiotic systems work together to create an artistic, meaning-full text” (p.241), that is, how spoken, written and paralinguistic show meaning, and how learners in turn use language to create and discuss it. These ideas are addressed in the descriptors in the CEFR-CV for intermediate and proficient foreign language learners, such as the ability to “follow films employing a considerable degree of slang and idiomatic usage” (Council of Europe, 2020, p.53), as this requires learners to engage with the cultural cues and to infer non-explicit meaning.

In addition to the different types of approaches which may be implemented to analyse films, preparation and guidance are also necessary. As Viebrock (2016) argues, films should not be brought into class without previous preparation, hence

the need to develop *pre-viewing*, *while-viewing* and *post-viewing* activities with learners. By scaffolding the use of film in the classroom, its learning potential is achieved through the active participation of students at all stages.

## **2.2. Language and Culture in Film**

Language acquisition is the individual lifelong process of experiencing and acquiring new language, including linguistic forms and practices, connotations and discourse practices, deemed as inseparable (Risager, 2006). The use of film in the EFL classroom allows for a dynamic analysis of language in use, as it requires different layers of understanding and interpreting. Moreover, when speaking a language, users embody more than grammar and vocabulary. They are encompassing a culture in words and gestures, a concept coined as 'languaculture' by Michael Agar in 1994.

Sert and Amri (2021) examined the benefits of student interactions in a discussion task based on a film watched in class where students were asked to narrate the scenes. Results suggest that co-narration entails the reorganisation of what is perceived into new meanings and understandings. This collaborative meaning-making process is described by the authors as one of the goals of learning, alongside "unknown vocabulary or grammar items" (p.127). When focusing on grammar, Sert and Amri (2021) concluded that students corrected each other and suggested better wording, revealing a focus on culturally adequate vocabulary. What was first a linguistically focused approach became a cultural one, as students discussed both content and language issues. Thus, films can be culturally stimulating and, as noted by Chao (2013), by watching culture in action, learners confront their own perceptions with those of the cultures being represented, thus allowing them to engage with their own sense of criticality, crucial in an Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) approach. For this reason, the use of films in EFL classes may develop students' critical cultural awareness.

Considering the link between language and culture, Risager (2007) envisions culture as meaning, so that language may never be "languaculturally neutral" (p.171). By using a foreign language, learners begin to understand that they create meaning

in it as well. ICC then, refers to students' ability to communicate effectively with other cultures and establish comparisons and contrasts with their own to critically analyse and understand them. The combination of language skills with knowledge and attitudes helps learners to become intercultural citizens, an aim of Foreign Language (FL) education.

However, according to Byram (1997), for learners to develop their ICC, they have to first look at their own perspectives. Thus, cultural self-awareness is the first step to exploring personal qualities, such as "empathy, open-mindedness and respect for others" (Corbett, 2010, p.2). This process entails evaluating and valuing 'otherness' in view of cultural exploitation and mediation (Finch et al., 2003). Therefore, taking film into consideration, the gradual exposure of learners to other cultures contributes to resistance to the stereotypical concept of the other (Corbett, 2010). One example of a task where learners are exposed to different cultural perspectives whilst considering their own starting point is through subtitling (Borghetti, 2011), since it requires learners not only to understand the verbal message, but also to comprehend and interpret nonverbal and cultural cues. According to the Council of Europe (2020), in tasks such as subtitling, learners will develop their competencies for "using contextual, grammatical and lexical cues to infer attitude, mood and intentions and anticipate what will come next" (p.60).

### **3 Methodology**

Considering Burns' (2019) approach to teaching, action research brings together the action, which involves a planned intervention, and the research, which entails observing students and identifying issues that need to be addressed.

The research question "How may the use of filmic text in the EFL classroom, and students' participation in tasks centred around it contribute to their language and culture?" was built on the notion of a classroom context where, after a period of observation, students would be presented with a different teaching approach that would tackle some of the issues noticed. After observing an 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade

class, some of the issues noted were the different levels of students' engagement, very much dependent on the type of activity developed.

According to the national curriculum, when leaving secondary education in Portugal, learners are expected to be able to recognise symbolic languages and different representations of the real and the imaginary, which are essential to the communicative processes in personal, social, learning and pre-professional situations (Martins et al., 2016), in which the use of linguistic products, such as artistic representations of language and culture are encompassed. When analysing films, both learners' interpretation skills as well their intercultural awareness are necessary to fully engage with the tasks that aimed at developing their linguistic and cultural competencies.

Throughout the practicum, the films chosen took into consideration the linguistic learning potentials and the topics of the school curriculum. For instance, when choosing *The Breakfast Club* (Hughes, 1985) to present school cliques or *Dead Poet's Society* (Weir, 1989) to discuss issues such as choosing a future career whilst in school and the pressures of having to do well in one's studies, learners were faced with characters' reactions and choices, with which they may or may not have agreed, and they now had the setting to discuss these topics, while using English (Hofmman, 2018).

When it came to presenting the films, the sandwich approach (where only a few scenes are shown) was chosen because it allowed the selection of pivotal moments for the set learning objectives and provided information about the scenes which were not shown in class (Viebrock, 2016, p.25). When analysing films in a classroom setting, no film should 'be presented without preparation' (p.26). The *pre-viewing* activities provided the context of the film and presented the potential linguistic issues learners might have to deal with, thus focusing on their expectations and associations. For instance, in one activity, specific vocabulary was introduced through the elicitation of idioms related to technology, the objective of which was for learners to use them in context, during the *while-viewing* activities. *Post-viewing* activities allowed for more in-depth interpretation, evaluation and discussion. These ranged from re-writing a moment based on

expected reactions, the change of media in which the story was retold or a change of perspective when describing events.

Throughout the action research, a number of data collection tools were implemented in order to assess language and cultural acquisition of the students after viewing and analysing different scenes from films. These included focus groups, with a subsequent analysis of the recordings and the collection of written assignments as part of post-viewing activities for assessment both by the researcher and learners' peers.

Considering the learners' level of engagement, it was necessary to evaluate whether the use of film and associated tasks served the purpose of being motivational vehicles of linguistic items and cultural nuances. In the classroom, students' different reactions and level of engagement were noted in a Student Teaching Practice (STP) notebook and results are presented here as quotes from the notebook. When a student participated in a group task in English they would get a square (representing a closed space) with an 'E' next to their name; if it happened in Portuguese, they would get a square with a 'P'; if it happened during activities led by the teacher, such as class discussions or asking/answering direct questions, they would get a circle (representing that everyone was part of it) with a letter corresponding to the spoken language. This system allowed for a visual depiction of students' participation rate and for a feasible and quick analysis. A record was kept at the end of each lesson on an Excel file, with each participation equating to number 1 (when in Portuguese) or 2 (when in English).

Outside the classroom, focus group discussions were held. As an example of qualitative research, these involved a "focus on specific issues with a predetermined group of people, participating in an interactive discussion" (Hennik, 2013, p.1). The interaction between the participants, a group of 10 students (5 male and 5 female) per class, each lasting between twenty and forty-five minutes, allowed them to feel comfortable in sharing their views and opinions. Conducting focus groups as the lessons progressed aimed not only at identifying the level of understanding of what the benefits of these lessons might be for the participants, but also at analysing their insights and awareness of their progress in terms of

language and culture. All sessions were recorded and some sections were transcribed, with results being presented as direct quotes.

In addition to the focus groups, some lessons included written assignments and/or homework tasks that were then collected. These were *post-viewing* activities, where students were expected to use revised structures for writing tasks. For instance, after revising the structure of a review, students were asked to write one from a rival restaurant of their choice, referring to a discussion that was sparked in class during the analysis of a scene from *The Hundred Foot Journey* (Hallström, 2014). Students were given the freedom to write derogatory critiques, considering that there is one point in the film where both restaurants are set on attacking each other's business, or eloquent critiques of the service. Students had to abide by the rules of the structure and use at least 10 items from the vocabulary list compiled during the unit, which encompassed both isolated words and idioms. Each text was corrected using the writing grading scheme from Cambridge and then compared to previously written assignments, so as to analyse potential progress in spelling and grammar.

### **3.1 Context**

Taking place in a private school in Sintra, the groups observed and taught were learners in the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle and secondary education. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade class had 26 students between the ages of 12 and 13, mostly at B1 level and the 10<sup>th</sup> grade had 28 students, between the ages of 14 and 16, mostly at B2 level. All students had Portuguese as their L1.

### **3.2 Tasks**

Any film in English can depict language in action and dialogue, and for instance can be analysed as an example of a grammar rule, or explored in terms of examples of non-standard English. A film can also be examined to identify words related to a particular topic or to predict the following events of a scene. For example, considering that the 8<sup>th</sup> grade was to learn about the world of work, the film *The Breakfast Club* (Hughes, 1985) was selected, as it depicts a school environment and

deals with the consequences of not abiding by certain rules and hierarchies. It also allowed for a discussion about the American school environment, where cliques are very common, and established a comparison with British and Portuguese school contexts.

This unit started by focusing on vocabulary acquisition, namely to do with cliques and character description. In the second lesson, students were given a reading task after analysing the characters' behaviour, as they all represented the stereotypes of their own cliques. For the third lesson, students had to predict what would come next in three different scenes. As they predicted the scenes and future verb tenses were elicited, they were shown the rules of future verb tenses and then used them to write their own predictions. The last lesson addressed the structure of an argumentative essay, as this was the task the characters had to complete in the film, which led to the students having to write their own version of the text, abiding by all the rules, which were revised. This was the first formal written assignment, which served as a term of comparison to those which followed during the practicum. It allowed the identification of the most common errors and assessment of how learners were able to formally use the specific vocabulary and structures that were revised during the unit.

However, using a language is communicating culture in words, and so, when analysing a film, learners can focus on details which indicate something about the characters' culture. Considering its cultural learning potential and the unit topic for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, which was food, the film *The Hundred-foot Journey* (Hallström, 2014) was chosen. The depiction of the struggles of an Indian family trying to make a success of their Indian restaurant, situated across the road from a Michelin-starred French restaurant in the French countryside displayed a collection of cultural encounters. Students were asked to discuss the quote "Food is memories", and to relate it to their own culture. The first lesson dealt mostly with their listening skills and vocabulary, focusing on specific scenes where food was described. It was interesting to note that students noticed significant cultural differences in the way the descriptions were made, with the association of vocabulary specific to each culture: 'bland', 'boring' and 'peaceful' for French cooking contrasted with 'colourful',

'lively' and 'messy' for Indian cuisine. These examples also show how films in the EFL classroom can present the dialogue between two or more cultures which can create a learning experience. Roell (2010) describes the filmic text as "a treasure trove" (p. 3) where students can be shown how people who come from contrasting settings deal with different issues.

### **3.2.1 Subtitling.**

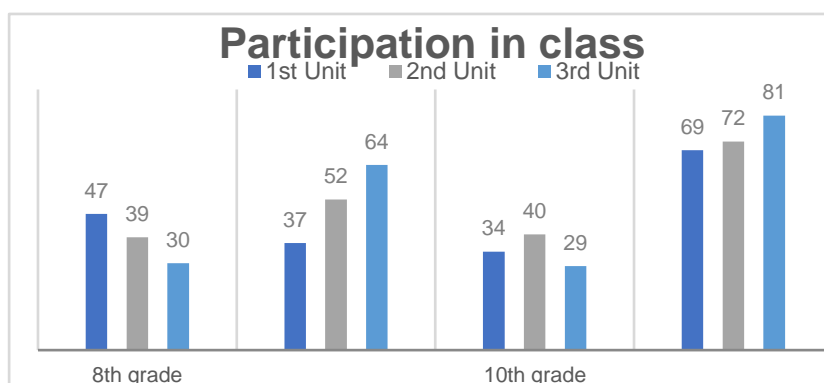
At the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> term, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade focused on a unit that dealt with how technological advances have changed everyday life. The film *Click* (Coraci, 2006) was selected, where the main character is given a remote control that allows him to pause, fast forward or skip certain events of his life. For their final lesson students completed an exercise which consisted of them re-watching the first scene they were shown and creating the subtitles for it. This required students to "assume the role of experts in that specific languaculture" (Borghetti, 2011, p.10), thus enabling them to explore the responsibility of translating from a language and culture which is not their own, to another. This scene was selected for the inclusion of colloquial expressions, such as 'gonna' and 'they can bite it hard', which cannot be directly translated into Portuguese, as it would lose its non-literal meaning. It was interesting to note that the biggest struggle was with the verb tenses, since in English there are considerably fewer options when compared to Portuguese. The colloquial expressions encouraged students not only to consider the wording of the subtitle, but also what equivalent expression to choose to keep the meaning, and make it clear to the target audience.

## **4 Results**

### **4.1 Participation**

Overall, the level of engagement and participation in all activities was higher than that at the beginning of the school year. Using a marking system that differentiated students' participation in terms of language (English or Portuguese) and context (group or class/teacher interactions), it was possible to create a visual

representation of the increase in their participation and use of English. By adding the squares per student and comparing with the total number of proposed activities, evidence showed that for the majority of students, the 'Ps (that is, the incidences of use of L1) turned mostly into 'Es (representing the use of the FL) by the second unit of work. Figure 1 shows that for learners in the 8<sup>th</sup> year, the use of Portuguese decreased from 47 to 30 incidents over the period of study, and from 34 to 29 incidents for 10<sup>th</sup> year learners. Concurrently, the use of English increased from 37 to 64 incidents for 8<sup>th</sup> year learners and from 69 to 81 for 10<sup>th</sup> year students. This also allowed me to identify students with particular difficulties in making the transition to using only English in class, which could, in the future, be the starting to cater for these learners' needs. Noteworthy is also the fact that most students who did not participate in the first few lessons became avid speakers in the last ones, with a steady maintenance of participation for those who began the year already taking part in English in the activities.



**Figure 1** Comparison of incidence and language of participation for year 8 and year 10 students over the period of study

The focus groups allowed students to share information about what they saw and what they perceived, and then contrast and compare it with each other. As each unit was completed, the number of volunteers who wanted to participate increased, as some mentioned that the class time was not enough to fully discuss the topics. As stated by one of the students "There are topics that are not directly linked to the questions but that seem to come up. I get that Miss needs the answers

to the questions, but we should have more time to talk about the rest, like what would happen if this was a Portuguese restaurant in Mexico, for example" (STP notebook, 24 January).

In turn, this indicates the growing concern they had with the quality of their participation, as they wanted to make themselves clear so that others would understand their points. Peer correction became prevalent both in speaking and in writing, where students were given the opportunity to correct each other's written assignments.

#### **4.2 Language**

Regarding their language acquisition, besides the vocabulary to deal with all tasks, results show that the revision of verb tenses and structures (e.g. reported speech) enabled students to discuss film events clearly, both in speaking and in writing tasks. In the latter, for the 10th grade, there was a general increase in their written assessment, with most students increasing by three marks (out of 20) the grades in their assignments compared to the first assignment (a formal letter written in December) and the last (changing the ending of a story, in April). As Steckmest (2021) discusses, active viewing as a fifth skill in the EFL classroom can only happen because the other four skills are being worked on, as their confluence allows for an immersion of the students in the analysis and discussion of films along with their implications in their own culture.

It is arguably challenging to evaluate their linguistic acquisition without applying a test to assess their development. However, throughout the different sessions, it was clear that learners were growing more aware of each other's mistakes, with several instances of peer correction taking place during their participation in speaking tasks. If at first it mainly happened with one or two participants correcting their peers, by the second focus group there were more instances in which this happened, with a particular emphasis on verb tenses. Students grew more aware of the difference between using the past to describe the events of the film and the present to link it to their own reality, with one student noting that "(...) if you use that past I just assume you are talking about the film, so I

didn't understand that you were actually talking about you" (STP notebook, 2022). The descriptor related to the different levels of understanding conversations between others at B2 level states that students 'Can follow a chronological sequence in extended informal discourse, as in a story or anecdote' (Council of Europe, 2020, p.49) and the aforementioned sentence is proof that they were able to follow in films and understand the sequence and what verb tense to use when describing the events.

### **4.3 Culture**

Considering Sert's (2017) stance on how creating tasks that involve the discussion of a film gives students the opportunity to actively learn a language, the present results demonstrate how these students, as EFL learners, displayed culture in words when they partook in group discussions.

At the beginning of each focus group, students shared their favourite characters and explained their choices. Regarding *Dead Poets Society* (Weir, 1989), the first film analysed in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, one student suggested that the film had two main characters, Neil Perry, the student who took his life (his favourite character), and Mr. Keating, the teacher, which led to a discussion about the features of a main character. Furthermore, the links the students established between the several films viewed as the units went on, with seemingly unrelated topics, were a sign of how English is a vehicle for communication with others about a myriad of topics and not just a list of vocabulary to be memorised for a test. During the final focus group with the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, a student asked his classmates what they thought would have happened if Coach Carter, the main character from *Coach Carter* (Carter, 2005), had to deal with the students from *The Breakfast Club* (Hughes, 1985), the second film they worked with. This turned into a conversation about whether Coach Carter's teaching approach would work at a school like theirs. This connection between their culture and how it could clash with outside reality was established by students and discussed within the group. Confronting this with the descriptors of what is expected of students at the B1 level, which state that learners "Can follow many films in which visuals and action carry much of the storyline, and which are

delivered clearly in straightforward language” (Council of Europe, 2020, p.53), it is evident that they were doing more than that, as they interpreted the cultural meaning behind certain behaviours and considered how that would be dealt with in their own culture.

However, one of the most relevant tasks that dealt with students’ intercultural awareness and which developed this dimension was a scene where racial slurs were used and a group of students were offended, whilst another said that there was a point in what was being said because the characters had, in fact, tried to bring their Indian culture into the French countryside. This led to a class discussion based on anonymously provided questions, such as ‘Why are you so offended by the idea of Indian people bringing their culture with them?’, ‘Do you think all Indian restaurants in your hometown are imposing their culture on you?’ and ‘Do you think this would have happened if they had opened a French restaurant? Would it have been better or worse?’. These questions point towards an awareness of a clash between two cultures and the possible link between these depicted in the film and the students’ own. The question regarding their own hometown is an example of Byram’s (1997) *s’engager* skill, because students showed that they were wondering and questioning how their own culture would react if put in the same position. The ability to put themselves in the other’s shoes – with both cultures, in this case – is the cultural self-awareness that Corbett (2010) and Finch et. al (2011) refer to.

Besides actively engaging with language and culture when completing the tasks, students also faced their own preconceived notions regarding other cultures and how that contrasted with their own. Their participation in the subtitling task showed a growing awareness of how vocabulary plays a role in understanding others. When choosing how to translate idiomatic expressions, students struggled with finding equivalents, as the direct translation would only reflect the word and not its meaning, according to one of the groups. Linguistically, this confirms Borghetti (2011) and Kanellopoulou et. al’s (2019) conclusions of how subtitling gives students the opportunity to combine the verbal and the non-verbal system of a language.

Culturally, Byram's (1997) call to challenge students to confront their reality and to question how to communicate on different levels of sensitivity was also present, for example, when a discussion centred around racism started after watching a scene from *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (Hallström, 2014). Students' cultural awareness developed in two ways: they decoded the literal and the historical meaning behind the messages and they encoded them into their own reality. This confrontation of beliefs and attitudes was only possible because they perceived how different cultures could communicate, thus increasing their knowledge of how others see the same issues in different ways.

## **5. Conclusion**

Including film analysis in the EFL classroom entailed designing new materials, using the national guidelines as the basis for the unit plans, which may be challenging and freeing as the sole focus becomes the learning needs of the students, and how each lesson can actively engage them with English and encourage them to take a step further in their linguistic and cultural acquisition. This allows the exploration of an area that seems to be underdeveloped and full of learning potential that could benefit students, as the need to focus on visual literacy is growing exponentially. If their screen time is increasing, bringing the filmic reality into the classroom is breaking down walls and using it to their advantage.

It is important to consider the challenges and the foreseeable adaptations when attempting to implement similar unit plans in other environments. Firstly, since using film in the classroom relies heavily on the use of technology, this could be overcome by reworking the structure of the lessons into a flipped classroom scheme, where students engage with the scenes at home, and follow some of the activities independently, thus saving group work and all speaking activities for the class. This could be interesting to examine two different areas in which the learning process could be developed. Firstly, how learners would work on their autonomy and secondly, how it would influence the role of the teacher.

In conclusion, the linguistic and intercultural potentials in the analysis of a film and the communicative competence when decoding its meaning, and

analysing it in a context where more than one culture is present are skills that I wish to work on with all my future students. Considering the importance that films had during the practicum, I believe that exploring film in the classroom is highly advantageous for students because its multimodality ensures the development of all skills required to proficiently communicate in a foreign language.

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Dialogic literary gatherings in EFL:  
Fostering quality language learning through dialogic interaction  
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**Abstract** | Dialogic literary gatherings (DLGs) are inclusive dialogic whole-class interaction activities that have proven to contribute to improving students' academic achievement, as well as inclusion and social cohesion, and which can be transferred to any context (Flecha & INCLUD-ED, 2015). By stressing oral interaction as a means to learning and as learning itself, this short study investigates if the implementation of DLGs in a lower secondary EFL classroom in Portugal fosters the emergence of learning opportunities for quality language learning. A classroom observation method was applied, with data being analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Results show that DLGs provide a number of varied learning opportunities which seem to increase with regular exposure to DLGs, and when a student plays the role of moderator. Further investigation is required on the impact of implementing DLGs in the EFL classroom.

**Keywords** | *inclusive dialogic learning, dialogic literary gatherings, oral interaction, learning opportunities*

## 1 Introduction

Dialogic literary gatherings (Flecha & INCLUD-ED, 2015) are whole-class teacher-or student-moderated interaction activities that contribute to improving students' academic success and overcoming educational and social exclusion. They are one of six successful educational actions (SEAs) that fulfil the double goal of promoting effective learning for all and social cohesion in any educational context, and were identified through a large-scale EU-funded research project called *INCLUD-ED: Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education*, which investigated the educational strategies that could help Europeans overcome inequalities and promote social cohesion.

DLGs have been implemented in classrooms, from preschool to higher education, as well as in non-formal educational settings in several European and Latin American countries. They have proven to impact students' learning, development, and inclusion in general, and may be a useful practice to help tackle two prevalent EFL-related problems: a monologic and structural teaching approach, and little language exposure. However, considering that in an EFL setting the target language is both the medium and the content of learning, specific research in this context is needed. This short study aims to evaluate if and to what extent implementing DLGs in the context of a lower secondary state school EFL classroom contributes to developing students' linguistic learning, i.e. it is expected to respond to the following research question:

- Does the implementation of DLGs in the lower secondary EFL classroom generate opportunities for quality language learning?

## 2 Literature Review

This section is dedicated to discussing the concept of inclusive dialogic learning, as well as describing DLGs, one of six identified successful educational actions within the inclusive dialogic approach to learning (Flecha & INCLUD-ED, 2015). Furthermore, and despite the lack of research in the EFL context, studies on the implementation of DLGs in an L2 setting are presented. Next, a short reflection

about existing research on language learning through peer interaction is made, and finally the concept of quality language learning and the definition of learning opportunities within it are discussed.

### **2.1 Inclusive Dialogic Learning**

The dialogic learning approach (Aubert et al., 2016) draws on the work of scholars in the field of the social sciences, who have stressed the communicative and dialogic character of our society (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1987), and who believe that social change, human development and learning occur dialogically (Aubert & Soler, 2007). In education, effective learning occurs when students question the ideas and opinions of others, such as their peers and their teachers (Freire, 2005; Reznitskaya et al., 2009). Through this process, students and their teachers learn together (Freire, 2005) by negotiating and co-constructing knowledge. Bakhtin (1981) states that meaning arises through dialogue at whatever level it takes place, as everything we say or think is a dialogical social event. Hence, interaction and communication are central in dialogic learning, in which dialogue is not a mere genre of discourse or an instructional technique. Drawing on what Matusov calls strong dialogism (2009), dialogue is relational and enables reflectional knowledge and knowing even about one's own knowledge. It is a dialogue among equals, where everyone has the freedom to speak their mind, to take part in all the stages of the learning process and to make decisions, i.e. it is a social meaning-making process.

As to inclusion in education, it occurs when all students share a common activity, and understand its meaning and purpose (Dewey, 2001). Reflection takes place *in dialogue with*, not just *explaining to*, everyone. Being aware that the teacher does not know or control everything, but takes part in learning with them, students feel they have a say. They know their opinion matters and feel free to share their ideas, their own perspective of the subject being learnt, of the world, and of life (Freire, 2005). An inclusive classroom is then a context that empowers students, validates their life experiences and cultural background, and scaffolds their learning.

The INCLUD-ED research project identified six inclusive dialogic learning practices, also known as successful educational actions (SEAs), which are

practices that contribute both to students' academic success and to social cohesion, and can be transferred to any type of socioeconomic or cultural context, with Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLGs) being one of them (Flecha & INCLUD-ED, 2015). All SEAs follow the concept of *dialogic learning* and its seven principles, as defined by Flecha (2000). These actions and principles have been implemented in over 9000 schools in 14 European and Latin American countries, which take part in the *Schools as Learning Communities* (SLC) project (Comunidades de Aprendizaje, n.d.). The SLC network also includes universities, governments, and other private and public organisations, which, together, aim at social and educational transformation of whole educational communities, through egalitarian dialogue and evidence-based learning.

The SEAs have proved to contribute to improving academic achievement for all students, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, students belonging to cultural minority groups, and students with special needs, while also enhancing their inclusion at school and in society (Navarro-Mateu et al., 2021). This short project will focus on studying the implementation of one of those SEAs, dialogic literary gatherings (DLGs), in the lower secondary EFL classroom, and its effects on language learning.

## **2.2 Dialogic Literary Gatherings**

DLGs are teacher or peer mediated whole class peer-interaction activities organised around the discussion of the reading of the classics of world literature, the focus of which is on the co-creation of meaning among peers. Evidence gathered through a large scale research project called INCLUD-ED (Universitat de Barcelona, 2010) revealed that the regular implementation of DLGs in educational contexts improves reading and overall language skills, and offers students the opportunity to reflect on profound topics related to life that do not often emerge in regular classroom interaction, but benefit social relationships inside and outside the classroom and school (Flecha & INCLUD-ED, 2015).

DLGs' fundament is *dialogic reading* (Soler-Gallart, 2001), a way of understanding reading in which texts are interpreted between participants, whether they are regular readers or not. The first experiences, emotions or

meanings that arise from reading are objects of dialogue and collective reflection, which goes further than only understanding the *meaning* of the text. The individual experience of reading becomes an intersubjective experience, and the incorporation of different voices, experiences and cultures generates understanding that goes beyond what can be achieved individually. In education at large, dialogic reading practices such as DLGs increase vocabulary, expand reading comprehension, improve oral and written expression, develop critical thinking and argumentation skills, and produce important transformation in overcoming inequalities.

DLGs are opportunities for *egalitarian dialogue* to take place in the classroom, as they allow the pupils and the teacher, a parent or any other member of the local community, to discuss ideas about the reading of a classic of literature, regardless of the position of power of the person who speaks. Ideas are to be listened to and valued by everyone according to their validity, not the status of the person who is sharing them (Flecha, 2000). So, DLGs contribute to a classroom environment in which students feel more confident to communicate with each other and the teacher, who, when a well trained and experienced DLG facilitator, feels an equal, and whose role is not to teach or provide evaluative feedback, but to communicate authentically.

Research has been conducted both on the social and academic impacts of DLGs (García-Carrión et al., 2020; López de Aguilera, 2019). However, studies on the implementation of DLGs in L2 education are scarce, and, to the best of this author's knowledge, there is as yet no research on DLGs in the EFL classroom. The intention of this short study is to investigate the interactions that take place during the implementation of DLGs in an EFL lower secondary classroom, in order to identify the learning opportunities that arise from the discussion, and analyse to what extent the DLG environment fosters language learning.

### **2.3 Previous Studies on DLGs in L2 Learning Contexts**

Due to the lack of research on the impact of the regular implementation of DLGs in secondary level EFL classrooms, three studies in the field of Basque as an L2, conducted by Santiago-Garabieta et al. (2021; 2022, 2022) in secondary education

settings are presented in this subsection. All three studies are qualitative and follow the framework of the communicative methodology of research (Gómez et al., 2019), which is founded on egalitarian dialogue between researchers and participants. Santiago-Garabieta et al. (2021) suggest that DLGs may encourage participation in collaborative interactions, while fostering the inclusion of L2 learners, promoting a taste for literature and improving literature competence. Santiago-Garabieta, García-Carrión, et al. (2022) demonstrate that engaging students in meaningful discussions through Basque contributes to positively changing their attitudes towards the language. Finally, Santiago-Garabieta, Villardón-Gallego, et al. (2022) studied the development of oral communication skills through DLGs. The findings of this study show that students' L2 oracy skills are developed during these dialogic literary encounters, particularly in cognitive and socio-emotional areas. This study reflects on how DLGs, as dialogic spaces, increase students' exposure to the L2 (Basque), which, despite being an official language, is a minority language. This is similar to EFL in most of its contexts, with low language exposure and few opportunities to practise and use the language in real-life everyday contexts, which can be increased through the implementation of dialogue-based learning environments such as DLGs.

#### **2.4 Researching Language Learning through Peer Interaction**

Peer interaction is any communication-focused activity conducted between learners, where there is little or no participation from the teacher, and which may include cooperative and collaborative learning, peer tutoring, and other types of help from peers (Philp et al., 2014). Swain and Lapkin (1998) stated that peer interaction plays a highly relevant role in developing learners' expression in the target language, contributing to their progress in language production and expanding their linguistic ability. The authors also claim that what occurs in collaborative dialogues, not only contributes to learning, but *is* learning.

Peers feel less anxious about making mistakes when interacting with each other, and this is particularly important with teenagers. Peer interaction carries

affective benefits that are motivating for learning (Dörnyei, 1997). They are more likely to experiment with new phrases or structures and this helps them move from formulaic language to being able to use target language forms to express themselves. Peer interaction also puts pressure on students to communicate, and that triggers second language development, by providing opportunities to notice problems and address the features of the target language (Gass, 2003).

Cognitive (Long, 1996; Swain, 1995), sociocultural (Lantolf, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1998) and sociocognitive approaches have been adopted to investigate language learning through peer interaction. Considering that both cognitive and sociocultural approaches are useful, but limited, and that mind, body and world collaborate to generate language learning, the present study adopts a sociocognitive approach (Atkinson, 2011).

### **2.5 Quality in Language Education: Opportunities for Learning**

This study focuses on the quality of the *process* of teaching and learning, i.e., the belief that quality depends on how the participants in the classroom, both teacher and students, provide and exploit quality learning opportunities (Crabbe, 2003), that is, how they create and manage the many planned or unplanned learning opportunities that arise during a language lesson.

Crabbe (2003) defines *opportunity for L2 learning* as the access to any activity that may lead to increasing language knowledge or proficiency, such as the opportunity to negotiate meaning in a discussion, to read and draw meaning from a text, or to explore a pattern in language use. In this sense, interaction, i.e., speaking and writing with one or more interlocutors in real or simulated communicative situations, is a learning opportunity (Crabbe, 2007). Dialogic interaction, such as that taking place in a DLG environment, provides opportunities for authentic conversations among learners and between them and the teacher. In those discussions students often make use of functional language in a similar way to real-life talk (Oliver & Philp, 2014), and think together with others (Mercer, 2002). The topics under discussion emerge from the reading of the classics, and the stories and characters are often related by students to their own lived experiences.

Following the concept initiated in the ORACLE study of group work (Galton et al., 1999), this short study also considers the utterance length and the teacher-student talk ratio provided by DLGs (Hargreaves & García-Carrión, 2016) as learning opportunities, as they are indicators of the amount of output allowed to students during DLGs (Swain, 1995). Learning opportunities have been identified in interaction in the language classroom, such as co-construction (Ohta, 2001), peer repair (Gao, 2021), self-repair (Hellermann, 2009), asking others, explaining and suggesting (Leslie, 2017). Also, students often use *code-switching* and *lexical transfer* as learning strategies and to keep communication going, particularly when under the pressure of communicating in an oral interaction activity, so code-switching has also been considered a learning opportunity in this context (Leslie, in press).

In conclusion, this study analyses the quality of learning during DLGs as the creation and management of learning opportunities, both by the teacher and the learners, deriving from the authentic discussion about the reading of the classics of world literature.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants**

This short project was implemented at a secondary state school in Portugal, in the Ponte de Sor school cluster, with a class of eighth grade students, which corresponds to lower intermediate or B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020). The group of 20 students was heterogeneous in terms of gender (9 female and 11 male students), age (13 to 16), and, to a certain extent, in their cultural and linguistic background (3 students had recently come to Portugal from other countries). All the students took part in the DLGs, some of them with previous supported reading provided by the teacher and/or two students in the class in weekly tutoring sessions. The teacher who implemented the DLGs had previous training in Learning

Communities/Successful Educational Actions, and experience as a facilitator of DLGs.

### **3.2 Procedure**

The DLGs were implemented in 50-minute weekly sessions during the second semester, for 9 weeks, as part of regular EFL activities, to discuss the classic of world literature *Sherlock Holmes, Short Stories* (Conan Doyle, 2000). The sessions took place face-to-face in the school library, with the participants sitting in a circle.

DLGs follow an evidence-based method ([Flecha & INCLUD-ED, 2015](#)). Before the DLGs the class: (1) selected a book among the classics of world literature and (2) agreed on the number of pages to be read for each DLG session. Each participant read the text at home, individually or with the help of a family member, or at school, with support from teacher/peers, and selected a sentence, paragraph, or idea to share in the DLG, and thought about the reasons for their choice. During the DLG sessions, students enrolled to speak by raising their hand. The moderator (teacher or student) noted down their names and gave the floor to each participant, who read the chosen paragraph aloud and explained the reasons why s/he selected it. Then the moderator gave the floor to other participants, so that they could discuss that same paragraph (make comment, agree, disagree, argue, counter argue). The procedure was repeated with each idea shared for the full duration of the DLG.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

Sessions 5 (moderated by the teacher) and 8 (moderated by one of the students) were audiotaped, and about 10 minutes of each session were selected to be transcribed, because they were the moments in which most students, (eight students in both groups), engaged in the conversation. Besides sharing their ideas about the text, they engaged in the discussion of topics raised by reading the text such as *love* (session 5), *racism* and *people's ability to change* their mind and behaviour (session 8). The two sections of the audiotaped material were transcribed verbatim, following conventions by Oliver and Philp (2014), and length

of utterances was calculated in order to be analysed quantitatively and qualitatively in terms of the emergence of learning opportunities.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The transcripts were read and reread in search of students' talk on content and talk on language as learning opportunities, such as co-construction (Ohta, 2001), peer repair (Gao, 2021), self-repair (Hellermann, 2009), asking others (for content and language), code-switching (Leslie, in press), explaining and suggesting (Leslie, 2017). Furthermore, talk that pointed towards the use of functional language (e.g. arguing, reasoning, speculating, stating opinion) was considered. In addition, the length of students' contributions and the student-teacher talk ratio were measured as indicators of output as a learning opportunity (Swain, 1995), and compared with previous findings (Hargreaves & García-Carrión, 2016).

The identified learning opportunities were quantitatively and qualitatively analysed, by identifying, listing and providing examples from the data, and counting the number of opportunities found.

## 4 Results

The present study aims to evaluate if and to what extent the implementation of DLGs generates learning opportunities and contributes to improving learning in the lower secondary EFL classroom. Table 1 displays the nineteen types of learning opportunities that were identified in the transcribed material.

**Table 1** *Learning opportunities in the interaction*

Learning opportunities	Example
Arguing	"But in ... his other story uh... he said that he wasn't capable of loving anyone else. So, I think that doesn't make sense."
Asking others (language)	"They say they are not... <i>como é que se diz "igual"?</i> " [how do you say "igual"?] "Equal."
Asking others (content)	"Was it five pips or three pips?" "I think it was... three pips."

Co-construction	"(...) that someone... is... a racist for some time and then that person... changes. How can="
	"=Realise that he's wrong?"
Code-switching	"Ah, okay, I understand now! But this is... <i>isso assim... é um bocado mau, vá.</i> " [That is... a bit bad.]"
Defining	"(racism) it's like you don't like the people who are..."
Disagreeing	"(...) I think he's wrong."
Explaining	"So Holmes disguised himself..."
Humour	"(...) so you are wrong, I'm right [laughs]. I'm kidding"
Inviting	"Think about that."
Peer repair	"Or you can doesn't like." "[Dislike.]"
Providing examples	"(...) I want to say like an example of racism is like when you see ... uh... a black person in a shop you can think he's gonna steal something..."
Reasoning	"Because... if he was Sherlock Holmes... into the house, he doesn't enters."
Self-repair	"Rácism", I don't know, racism..."
Speculating	"(...) he probably changed his mind because he noticed that what they were doing was killing black people..."
Stating opinion	"So, I found that interesting... and kind of weird."
Suggesting	"He might be lying."
Supporting peers	RV "(...) I think..." JR "Do you think? You are wrong." MM "We think! [Laughs]"
Summarising	"but he dies after the... he received the letter."

Both transcripts were analysed quantitatively for learning opportunities in students' talk, by listing and counting the number of opportunities found. Table 2 shows the total number of learning opportunities by type in each session.

**Table 2** Type and total of learning opportunities by session

Learning opportunities			
Session 5 (transcript 1)		Session 8 (transcript 2)	
by type (number of turn)	Total no. of learning opportunities per total no. of students' turns (53)	by type (number of turn)	Total no. of learning opportunities per total no. of students' turns (69)
Asking others (14) Explaining (21, 23/25, 69) Reasoning (27, 74, 77) Stating opinion (32, 36, 74)	24 (45,3%)	Summarising (6) Explaining (20, 23) Code-switching (24, 28, 30, 32, 55, 58) Humour (29, 72)	32 (46,4%)

Co-construction (34) Speculating (37, 83) Arguing (41, 46, 69) Suggesting (42) Disagreeing (44, 58, 70, 79, 84) Code-switching (53) Supporting peers (85)		Asking others / providing information/language (34, 67, 77) Reasoning (42) Co-construction (46) Stating opinion (49, 51, 55) Arguing (57) Speculating (60) Self-repair (67) Defining (67) Providing examples (77, 84, 86) Peer repair (78, 79, 80, 81, 85) Inviting (86)	
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The data presented in Table 2 show that a number and variety of learning opportunities were found in both sessions. In session 8 there is a greater variety of learning opportunities than in session 5. This positive evolution could result from the fact that: (1) the students became more accustomed to the format of DLGs; and/or (2) the students became more engaged with the story as it developed; and/or (3) in session 8, the conversation was moderated by a student and the teacher was a participant along with the class, a “peer”, which may have encouraged students to experiment with the language more.

Overall, *code-switching* (seven occurrences), *stating opinion* (six occurrences), *disagreeing* (five occurrences), *explaining* (five occurrences), *peer repair* (five occurrences), *asking others* (four occurrences), *arguing* (four occurrences) and *reasoning* (four occurrences) are the most frequent learning opportunities. While code-switching shows that some students often use the L1 to be able to participate in the discussion and thus develop the L2 (Colina & Mayo, 2009), stating opinion, disagreeing, explaining, arguing and reasoning demonstrate the use of functional language by students to authentically discuss their ideas about and beyond the text, namely to analyse the story in detail, evaluate the characters’ behaviours, and relate them to their own lived experiences. Asking others and peer repair provide evidence that students interact collaboratively to

bridge their language and content gaps and work in their ZPD with scaffolding from their peers (Vygotsky, 1987). Reflection and discussion about and beyond the text are thus made possible even at a lower intermediate level such as a B1/8<sup>th</sup> grade EFL class.

As mentioned before, JO moderated session 8 and the teacher (T) took part in the conversation in a situation of equality to the students. On the one hand T had to enrol and wait for his turn to speak, on the other hand he could share his own ideas and comment on students' shared ideas. In this excerpt, students were discussing the reason(s) that made one of the characters – uncle Elias – run away from the United States, where he had been a member of the Ku Klux Klan, and the conversation evolved into a discussion about racism and people's ability to change.

### **Excerpt 1 (session 8)**

turn	participant	Talk
33	JO	D, you may talk.
34	D	Was it five pips or three pips?
35	JO	Uh... I think it was... three pips.
36	D	And... I'm pretty sure, I'm not sure about that... I'm pretty sure there was a piece of paper that wasn't burnt... in this part of the text.
37	T	That's what I just read.
38	D	Is it? There's is a piece of paper that was left...xx=
39	T	=The only document that is left from Uncle Elias's past. So it's the only thing we have.
40	D	And they're going after that...
41	T	Yeah.
42	D	I think he was a KKK member and then he left because he found it bad or he stole money and the documents... which is I think what we did but I think he might have been against racism because he wouldn't, you could just take the money and leave the papers or he could take the money and take the papers, which is what he did so I think he was against racism at some point.
43	T	[Interesting...]
44	JO	[to the teacher] You may talk.
45	T	So... nice, very nice... uh... idea. And I wonder and I ask everyone now if... you think that it's possible... that someone... is... a racist for some time and then that person... changes. How can=
46	JO	=Realise that he's wrong?

JO clearly adopts the role of moderator by giving participants the floor (turns 33 and 44), while also answering their questions (turn 35) and co-constructing

knowledge with them (turn 46), thus scaffolding his peers' development of oral communication.

If we compare excerpt 1 with excerpt 2 (see below), the latter taken from session 5, in which JO was one of the participants and T was moderating, we notice some differences. In excerpt 2, JO cleverly remembers that somewhere back in the story there was information about Sherlock Holmes' feelings for a specific woman and for women in general.

### Excerpt 2 (session 5)

turn	participant	Talk
53	JO	<i>Aqui</i> [Here]. Ah, can I read? Uhum... "For Sherlock Holmes, there was only one woman in the world ... he did not love her, because he never loved woman (sic)"=
54	D	=But... <i>mas isto é o Watson a dizer</i> [But this is Watson speaking]... isto não tá xx
55	JO	"Her name was..." Ah!
56	T	So... you might be right, but D might be right too, I guess. So, who's right here?
57	D	Me.
58	JO	<i>Não</i> [No].
59	D	É óbvio [It's obvious].=
60	JO	=I don't think so, because...
61	D	<i>Isto não é o Sherlock Holmes a dizer.</i> [This is not Sherlock Holmes speaking]=
62	JO	=Because, because I... I, I...
63	D	[laughs]
64	RV	<i>Ele tem sempre razão.</i> [He's always right]
65	JO	<i>Acerte ou erre...</i> [Whether I get it right or wrong]
66	T	That's not an argument, I'm afraid.
67	JO	The legend never miss.

In contrast to JO's attitude in session 8, here he fails to defend his point, switches into Portuguese, and ends up adopting a playful behaviour, presumably to divert attention away from his failure thus wasting what could have triggered several learning opportunities for the class.

These data may suggest that having a student moderating the DLG instead of the teacher contributes to improving participation among the class while fostering the moderator-student's responsibility, which leads to more adequate behaviour and, ultimately, contributes to generating more learning opportunities.

Having a student as moderator was an opportunity for JO's personal and linguistic development and a challenge for the class to experiment with ideas and language. Thus, session 8 became closer to what a peer interaction activity looks like, as a student moderated the discussion and the teacher's talk was limited by enrolment and turn-taking. Further research on this aspect could help clarify this idea.

Regarding students' contribution, the average utterance length was between 14,4 (session 5) and 15,6 words (session 8). Overall, students' utterances ranged between 1 and 108 words, and 27 (22,1%) out of the 122 students' utterances analysed were extended, i.e., consisting of at least 20 words. Also, students' talk share in the two analysed sessions was between 63,7% (session 5) and 88% (session 8), which is consistent with previous studies of DLGs and interaction in the classroom, such as the study conducted by Hargreaves and García-Carrión (2016), which recorded 75 to 97% pupil talk in an L1 primary setting in England. This contrasts with the amount of output allowed to students in so-called traditional classes where teacher-student interaction takes up most of the time, and the average students' talk share was 25% of the total speaking time (Galton et al., 1999). Data confirm that student talk share is very high and extended utterances are common in DLGs, which points to the high quality of learning opportunities provided by this dialogic practice and may indicate that in the social interaction fostered by DLGs, students think together with their peers and the teacher (Mercer, 2002) and effectively make use of functional language as an opportunity for their own and their peers' language learning (Oliver & Philp, 2014). Further research could confirm these aspects and show whether other factors, such as interest in the topic, willingness to communicate with peers students know well, positive affect in the class, or group cohesion, are involved.

## **5 Discussion and Conclusion**

This short project aimed to verify if and to what extent the implementation of DLGs in the EFL lower secondary classroom generates opportunities for learning. The

results show that DLGs create a considerable number and variety of learning opportunities, with *code-switching and stating opinion* being the most common. Data also suggest that learning opportunities are noticeably more diverse as the class gets more accustomed to regularly participating in DLGs and when a student, not the teacher, plays the role of moderator, releasing the teacher to be a participant with the class, and allowing for the development of egalitarian dialogue among the whole group: students and teacher. The analysis is also consistent with previous findings on the use of functional language as a tool for learning (Oliver & Philp, 2014).

The results discussed here hint at the application of the findings of the INCLUD-ED extensive research project (Flecha & INCLUD-ED, 2015) to the EFL context, namely the fact that DLGs foster language learning and social cohesion through egalitarian discussion about the classics of literature in the lower secondary EFL classroom. The findings are also consistent with other studies about DLGs and language education, such as the emergence of authentic conversations about substantial topics (Hargreaves & García-Carrión, 2016) the fostering of high levels of participation (Santiago-Garabieta et al., 2021), the development of students' oracy skills in the FL (Santiago-Garabieta, Villardón-Gallego, et al., 2022), and the improvement of students' attitudes towards a language they have little exposure to (Santiago-Garabieta, García-Carrión, et al., 2022). However, there is still limited understanding on the role of DLGs in supporting L2 or FL learning, so further studies need to be conducted in this field.

Other questions may be raised from the analysis conducted in the present study, such as the contribution of regularly implementing DLGs to student engagement, to the development of group cohesion within the class, or the impact that having a student as the moderator and the teacher as a participant has on the participation of students in the DLG.

Although this short classroom observation study shows that opportunities for language learning occur through DLGs, it has several limitations, such as the fact that it was conducted with a single group in a single school and by analysing only two excerpts of DLG sessions. Further research is required to analyse in depth

the impact of DLGs on the quality of language education, particularly in the context of EFL.

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Reforming Teacher Education in Portugal:  
A call for innovation and old-fashioned action  
Carlos Ceia | NOVA FCSH - CETAPS

**1 In-service Teacher Training in Portugal: The state of a Diffuse Art**

Portugal has a serious problem to solve immediately: the proven lack of teachers to ensure the constitutional right of access to free education in the public education system. Today, in Portugal, more than 30,000 pupils in primary and secondary education are without teachers in some areas of the curriculum.

Although this is an urgent problem, the first topic to be addressed here is the in-service training of current teachers. The degree of urgency in reforming this type of training is less than the shortage of teachers mentioned above, (which will be addressed later in the paper), but the consequence of maintaining the status quo is no less degrading. Unless pre-service training is carried out in the right place (universities and polytechnics), teacher education programmes exist in a kind of logistical chaos, with no attempt to reorganise the system by governments since the 1990s.

The in-service training of current teachers, provided for in the Foundational Law of the Educational System in 1986, has experienced unsustainable variations and interpretations over the years, and it is my belief that the present situation risks being a case, unique in the world, of training creativity with no quality control. We have a legal regime for continuous teacher training (Decree-Law No. 22/2014), which requires that "[the] teacher, as a trainee, has the right to:

- a) Choose the training actions most appropriate to his or her professional and personal development plan (...)

b) Attend free mandatory training for the purposes of his or her assessment of teaching performance and progression in their career (art. 17)<sup>o</sup>.

However, we have reached a point where this type of training has become so widespread that it is difficult to know what is training and what is entertainment.

Today, there are several entities that are allowed to offer continuing professional development (CPD), even if these entities were not created for that purpose. For example:

1. All training courses can be accredited by the Scientific and Pedagogic Council for Continual Education (*Conselho Científico-Pedagógico da Formação Contínua*, in Portuguese), an independent Portuguese entity that serves to give a seal of approval related not to quality but to conformity to pre-defined models.
2. School Association Training Centres (*Centros de Formação de Associação de Escolas*, in Portuguese), created in 1992, host multiple CPD courses. The quality control of the training is carried out solely through the results of satisfaction surveys of trainees. They have contributed to the maintenance of a national database of teacher trainers from the state's own network of primary and secondary school teachers. They also conduct the logistics of the external evaluation process of professional performance.
3. Professional associations also offer in-service teacher training courses.
4. The same can be said of scientific societies such as the Portuguese Mathematics Society, which has existed since 1940, and which also offers CPD courses.
5. Professional teacher associations are very focused on CPD, offering many training opportunities and different models of CPD.
6. Teachers' unions, which anywhere in the world serve to fight for better working conditions, in Portugal also offer CPD courses which lack quality control, are replicated everywhere, and seldom relate to research.

7. The Directorate General for Education (DGE) also offers in-service teacher education, even though its mission rightly states it is responsible for the execution of policies only.

To be able to proceed with a general logistical reorganisation would require the courage for a set of disruptive and corrective measures, without acquiescing to national entities, which over the last 20 or so years have taken advantage of the absence of a coherent policy of continuous teacher education. It is my belief that:

1. In-service teacher education should be positioned in the only place possible: higher education (universities and polytechnics), because only here are there highly qualified trainers to guarantee high-quality, timely training (research is non-existent in the unions, in the DGE or in school centres, where the instructors limit their actions to replicating the training they themselves acquired in universities and polytechnics).
2. It should be noted that Higher Education institutions (HEIs) are prepared to accept this challenge of mass training, because they are already responsible for the pre-service education of teachers and for all the research in education that is produced in Portugal. By virtue of the demanding quality control mechanisms of their courses and degrees, these institutions have the ideal conditions for teacher training. The well-known myth about the distance between the concerns of HEIs and the world of non-university education is just that: an idea lacking foundation in most cases.
3. The Scientific and Pedagogic Council for Continual Education is a dispensable body, as its level of intervention in the accreditation of all types of university and non-university training has no effective action.
4. The School Association Training Centres should be disbanded, since they do not have the highly qualified personnel necessary to meet the scientific demands of CPD, nor do they have any connection to advanced research in education that is duly externally evaluated, as happens in HEIs.

5. Decree Law No. 22/2014 (and Order No. 779/2019), related to progression within teachers' career, needs to be totally rethought. The career progression of primary and secondary school teachers cannot be at the mercy of isolated training courses, which do not represent advances in knowledge in the different subject areas, where the only criteria considered is the accumulation of training hours, to the detriment of the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.
6. The acquisition of master's and doctoral degrees must be valued in teaching careers as the highest point of achievement. These advanced degrees are evaluated by the *Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior* (Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education - A3ES) according to internationally accurate standards, which neither the Scientific and Pedagogic Council for Continual Education nor the Directorate General for Education nor any *ad hoc* training centre or association can achieve; intermediate (post-graduate) degrees are evaluated by the scientific councils of higher education institutions, with much greater precision than the evaluation of the Scientific and Pedagogic Council for Continual Education, rendering it obsolete.
7. Today, there are countless partnerships and cooperation protocols between HEIs and primary and secondary schools which ensure that the former do not have their backs turned to the latter.
8. There are international networks for continuous teacher training that Portugal should participate in more. For example, the European Teacher Education Network (ETEN), founded in 1988, or the School Education Gateway, from which we can learn a lot.
9. We must take advantage of the distance learning experience that the pandemic forced us all to acquire and invest in training courses created and managed by HEIs that are able to reach the entire community of teachers. If *Universidade Aberta* (the Portuguese Open University) played an important role when, 40 years ago, it was necessary to offer distance

in-service professionalization programs, today all Portuguese HEIs are also capable of offering online and distance learning.

It is true that all these measures together may represent a considerable break with the current system. But either we continue to complain daily that the CPD system is working poorly, or we move forward with courage towards a hard but necessary change to adjust the system to provide coherent training, with quality control and aligned with other internationally referenced training courses. The choice is between having better teachers or the same teachers trapped in a system that does not let them grow professionally or scientifically.

## **2. Pre-service Teacher Education in Portugal: The State of a Prolix Art**

In the last decade, there has been a drop in demand for master's degrees in teacher education (pre-service) if compared to the training models prior to 2007, when teacher education was integrated into an undergraduate degree or in so-called post-graduate courses in the form of educational training "branches" (*ramos de formação educacional*). Numbers have been declining for several years, and several factors have contributed: from the constant criticism of the teaching profession, about which we rarely hear or read anything positive, precarious conditions long, undervalued careers and deficiencies in CPD models, to a lack of financial support for teachers displaced from their area of residence, and, (I say this not in my own cause but in general), a lack of interest from many HEIs which do not recognize teacher education as a strategic area that should articulate the needs of the country with real integrated action programs between Government and training institutions.

There is now a greater awareness of the severity of the lack of teachers in Portugal. As early as 2016, the National Education Council produced a technical report that explained the need to train more teachers over the next 15 years, but it was simply ignored by the government. Presently however, many other politicians have changed their opinion and are now calling for urgent solutions after the public

alarm was sounded. HEIs are also opening their eyes to the problem but are passively waiting for greater certainties.

To solve the problem of the lack of teachers in Portugal requires a combined effort of many measures. Anyone who thinks that they can solve the problem with a single measure is deluding themselves. No country that has experienced this problem - and there is no shortage of countries in Europe that face the same challenge today - has been able to solve it overnight, precisely because it takes as long to solve it as it did to reach the collective awareness that it exists.

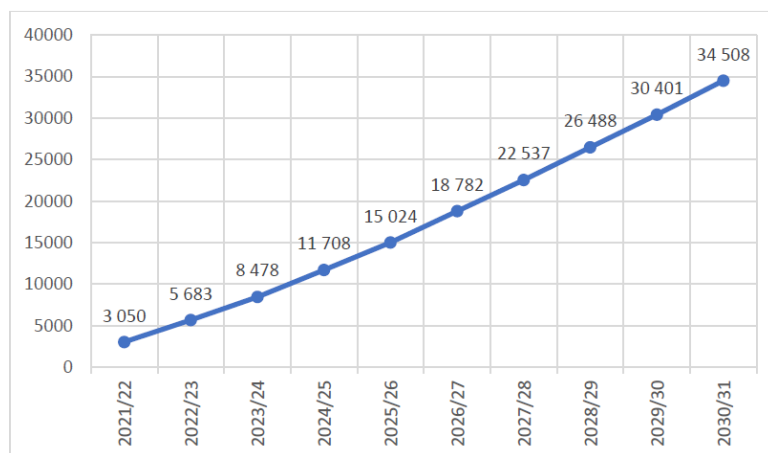
The report "Teaching Career in Europe: Access, Progression and Support",<sup>1</sup> which presents data from the Eurydice network, has already identified the problem not only in Portugal but also in several other European countries. In Portugal, approximately 1,500 graduates choose to take a pre-service master's degree in education annually. Therefore, in a decade, given the current supply, we will have 15,000 new teachers, which is far from the needs already foreseen of about 35,000 new teachers by 2030 (which could reach about 50,000 if we include in the projection the current entry of unqualified, untenured teachers). France today has 50% of untenured teachers, many of whom lack proper qualifications; Spain, in some autonomous regions, has started to recruit teachers without a master's degree in teaching as in Spain, this degree is only 1 year long and few can complete it in such a short time. There are also serious problems in Greece and Italy, etc. It is not exclusively a Portuguese problem, and it is not a 2022 problem! It is not even a European problem. The USA is also experiencing the same dilemma as many teachers have left teaching in the last two years, because it is a poorly paid job if compared to other professions. President Biden has already created the American Families Plan<sup>2</sup>, investing 9 billion dollars just to solve the problem of the lack of teachers in schools. Even before the pandemic, the US already needed more than 100,000 teachers.

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<sup>1</sup> European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, Birch, P., Piedrafita Tremosa, S., Davydovskaia, O., et al., *Teaching careers in Europe: access, progression and support*, Delhaxhe, A.(editor), Publications Office, 2019, <<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/309510>>

<sup>2</sup> See: "FACT SHEET: The American Families Plan", available at: <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/28/fact-sheet-the-american-families-plan>>

Another problem of current pre-service teacher education courses is that they are not even balanced across all cycles of study in pre-university schooling. The most serious is the 2nd Cycle (5th and 6th grades), which has almost disappeared from polytechnics and has been dismissed by universities, which can lead this cycle of schooling to a long period of lack of qualified professionals. This happened in the 1970s and 80s and led to a deregulation in the qualifications of teachers of this cycle of education that continues to this day. In the "Diagnostic Study of Teacher Needs from 2021 to 2030",<sup>3</sup> coordinated by Luís Catela Nunes (from the Knowledge Centre for Economics of Education at NOVA SBE) and in partnership with the Directorate General for Education and Science Statistics (DGEEC), it will be in the 3rd Cycle and Secondary Schooling that the need for recruitment will be greatest, since there will be a shortage of 15,663 new teachers by 2030; in the 1st Cycle 6,926 new teachers will be needed; in the 2nd Cycle, 5,655 and 4,419 in pre-school education.



Fonte: Cálculo dos autores com base nas Estatísticas da Educação 2018/19.

**Figure 1** Accumulative recruitment needs for new teachers in continental Portugal 2021/22-2030/31

However, the big difference is in the capacity and current interest of the training institutions, and for the 2nd cycle there are almost no teacher education courses available, nor has there been in recent years, contrary to the other cycles. There has

<sup>3</sup> Available in Portuguese at: <<https://www.dgeec.mec.pt/np4/506/>>.

been a long silence and general inactivity about the training of teachers for the 2nd cycle of basic education, and in the next decade we will pay a heavy price for this gap.

The previously mentioned study includes a projection of new teachers by 2030 by recruitment group (Tables 1 and 2 translated from the Portuguese version, *Estudo de diagnóstico de necessidades docentes de 2021 a 2030*”, available at: <https://www.dgeec.mec.pt/np4/506>).

**Table 1** *Accumulative recruitment needs for new teachers from 2021/22 to 2030/31 by recruitment group*

Cycle of education	Code	Recruitment group	2021/22	2025/26	2030/31
Pre-school Education	100	Pre-school education	494	2.412	4.419
1 <sup>st</sup> cycle of Basic Education	110	1 <sup>st</sup> Cycle Basic Education	420	3.502	6.853
	120	English	9	28	74
<b>Subtotal</b>			<b>429</b>	<b>3.530</b>	<b>6.926</b>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Cycle of Basic Education	200	Portuguese and Social/History studies	12	79	378
	220	Portuguese and English	5	18	60
	230	Mathematics and Natural Sciences	153	429	1.315
	240	Visual and Technical Education	133	429	999
	250	Musical Education	36	129	477
	260	Physical Education	55	180	564
	200, 210, 220	Portuguese [1]	216	631	1.861
<b>Subtotal</b>			<b>611</b>	<b>1.896</b>	<b>5.655</b>

**Table 2** *Accumulative recruitment needs for new teachers from 2021/22 to 2030/31 by recruitment group*

Educational Cycle	Code	Recruitment Group	2021/22	2025/26	2030/31
3 <sup>rd</sup> cycle and Secondary Education	300	Portuguese	206	1.134	2.861
	310	Latin & Greek	0	0	0
	320	French	31	123	405
	330	English	128	564	1.311

	340	German	0	2	2
	350	Spanish	4	12	49
	400	History	131	603	1.253
	410	Philosophy	70	360	765
	420	Geography	77	414	1.007
	430	Economics and Accounting	85	424	758
	500	Mathematics	155	618	1.551
	510	Physics and Chemistry	104	388	1.249
	520	Biology and Geology	103	500	1.231
	550	Computer Studies	35	77	394
	600	Visual Arts	96	446	1.054
	620	Physical Education	85	290	804
	610,997,530,999	Specialisations	141	593	964
		<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1.450</b>	<b>6.549</b>	<b>15.663</b>
<b>Special Education, Portuguese Sign Language and Moral and Religious Education</b>	290	Moral and Religious Education	9	79	250
	360	Portuguese Sign Language	0	0	1
	910	Special Education 1	51	514	1.516
	920	Special Education 2	5	32	58
	930	Special Education 3	0	10	19
		<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>636</b>	<b>1.845</b>
		<b>Total</b>	<b>3.050</b>	<b>15.024</b>	<b>34.508</b>

If we look at another study, "Regime for the Selection and Recruitment of Teaching Staff for Pre-School Education and Primary and Secondary Education"<sup>4</sup> (2019), we can better understand the recent capacity for pre-service teacher training in Higher Education, by master's degree in teaching/recruitment subject group:

<sup>4</sup> Published in Portuguese by the Conselho Nacional de Educação: "Regime de Selecção e Recrutamento do Pessoal Docente da Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensinos Básico e Secundário", available at: <<https://www.cnedu.pt/pt/noticias/cne/1495-estudo-estudo-regime-selecao-docentes>>

**Table 3** Number of Master's degree graduates by degree course (source: DGEEC, 2019 & CNE)

Teaching Master's degree course	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Early Years English	21	5	3	6	3
Pre-School Education	367	296	355	93	272
Pre-school and 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle of Basic Education	505	452	532	481	309
1 <sup>st</sup> cycle of Basic Education	30	8	10	5	2
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle of Basic Education	162	163	196	182	170
Science	23	5	9	1	2
Visual Education & Technology	45	15	3	3	2
Music	59	45	27	43	17
Physical Education	600	475	443	303	305
Portuguese	138	132	146	101	79
English	68	80	42	42	88
History and Geography	62	64	53	50	33
Physics & Chemistry	46	32	21	7	5
Philosophy	34	30	11	13	22
Mathematics	87	50	37	42	17
Biology & Geology	35	41	33	31	11
Computer Studies	37	33	25	11	33
Economics & Accounting	3	13	4	8	10
Visual Arts	143	100	60	22	40
Music	70	101	170	201	277
<b>Total</b>	<b>2549</b>	<b>2156</b>	<b>2195</b>	<b>1688</b>	<b>1718</b>

The 2016/17 total number of 1718 graduates from teaching Master's degree courses have fallen further over the last 5 years, and should now be closer to 1500 graduates per year. In view of these figures, it can be concluded that:

- The need for teachers is unequally distributed across teaching areas, with the most urgent cases being preschool education, basic education (1st Cycle), Music Education, Portuguese, English, History, Geography, Philosophy, Physics and Chemistry, Mathematics, Visual Education/Visual

Arts, Technology and Computer Studies (all cycles), and the area of special education. In the last 10 years, we have not addressed these needs and have trained teachers without regard to the subject areas most in need.

The general situation today forces the Portuguese government to initiate the appropriate policies to solve the problem that could turn the Portuguese educational system into chaos by 2030.

At the end of 2021, The Ministry of Education, presented a draft of the new policies for the future of teacher education in Portugal for the coming years. After parliamentary elections, we are still waiting for clarification from the new Ministry of Education, but we do not expect a major change to the previously announced solutions. It is now argued that the distribution of general scientific training favours curricular units that provide knowledge of learning processes, of the contexts in which they teach and of the curriculum. Simultaneously, the approach to pedagogical knowledge of a more general nature and articulated with transversal dimensions of the curriculum in relation to specific didactics is less frequent. This has never been my personal choice and never will be because I have always believed that training in specific didactics as well as training in the teaching subject areas is more important in pre-service education than in general educational training, which can be acquired and/or consolidated in multiple extracurricular contexts.

The most relevant measure proposed is that the component "Initiation to Professional Practice", including supervised teaching practice, would be increased to 50% of the total number of credits, assisted by a supervised seminar. Separating the *practicum* from the taught courses and placing it in cooperating schools away from any university guidance would be a huge mistake, an unjustified step backwards for a modality whose past results are well-known. Going back to the 1980s, the North America models of pre-service education on the job we imported then failed because professional preparation took place in schools, far away from universities supervision.

We could somehow recover the essence of what was the in-service professionalization model, certainly the best model we have had in teacher

education in the last 40 years. Without a doubt, we must value the practicum in master's teaching degrees. But there is no clarity in the practical implementation of the improvement proposals of such a complex system of teacher education if we do not assume that the performance of a full-time master's student/trainee teacher, with his/her own classes, in a cooperating school, during his/her initiation into professional practice, implies financial reward for the teaching work provided, as existed in the old model of in-service professionalization. And we should recognise the status of the cooperating teacher with a financial reward and reduction of teaching hours. If these two conditions are not respected, we will be facing a legally unsustainable model: as the Ministry of Education would be employing unpaid interns to solve the problem of the teacher shortage and would be forcing professionalized teachers to supervise their work, also for free. I hope that this political assumption will never be applied.

The National Education Council, in an opinion document from March 2021,<sup>5</sup> recommended that the national Recovery and Resilience Plan should include funds for pre-service teacher education. It is all a matter of political choice, and there are funds to sponsor a strategy of real action to train more teachers not only to solve the problem in the present, but in a sustained way in the future. It is true that the 2021-22 school year is the first of three years of implementation of the Learning Recovery Plan "21-23 School+" (<<https://escolamais.dge.mec.pt>>), which represents an investment of more than 900 million euros in public schools to strengthen human resources in schools, training and capacity building for teaching and non-teaching staff, increasing digital resources and equipping schools with equipment and infrastructure, but there are no indicators of what will be invested in training new teachers.

Revising the current Legal Regime of Professional Qualification for Teaching in Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education, in the sense indicated above, will only help to solve part of the shortage of teachers in the Portuguese education system. In the short term, it will always be necessary to articulate this measure with

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<sup>5</sup> Available at: <<https://www.cnedu.pt/pt/noticias/cne/1643-parecer-sobre-o-plano-recuperacao-e-resiliencia-prr>>.

others that are less complex in technical terms, but that require equal political courage:

1. The creation of incentives for teachers who have moved away from their area of residence, as happens in many other public professions and which governments have ignored. This has driven many professionals away from teaching.
2. Give more autonomy to schools to hire the teaching staff necessary and put an end to incomplete teaching timetables.
3. Eliminate from the curriculum subjects that currently occupy too much space, for example, Citizenship and Development, which is compulsory in all years of Basic Education and optional in Secondary Education. I see no need to go further than offering this transversal subject once in each cycle of Basic Education.
4. It is known that some Nordic countries, for example, have independent agencies for the acquisition of teaching qualifications. The opinion "Regime for the selection and recruitment of teaching staff for Pre-School Education and Basic and Secondary Education" of the Portuguese National Education Council (2020) describes several of these national examples<sup>6</sup>. But there is **one** variable here that makes all the difference: in countries such as Finland, Slovenia, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, teachers apply directly to schools for the specific vacancies that exist. In other words, an open and diversified model for acquiring professional qualifications requires a model of teacher employment that is decentralised from the state, to allow the local employer to decide which profile of teacher it wishes to recruit by looking closely at their training pathway. Without this system, we will have no way of distinguishing graduates with different training profiles in a national recruitment call.

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<sup>6</sup> "Regime de seleção e recrutamento do pessoal docente da Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensinos Básico e Secundário", available at: <<https://www.cnedu.pt/pt/noticias/cne/1495-estudo-estudo-regime-selecao-docentes>>, p. 83 ff.

5. In recent years qualified teachers have left the profession for many reasons: because they lacked opportunities near their place of residence, because the real life of the school failed to live up to their expectations, or because they gave in to the ever-increasing bureaucratic demands of the profession that prevent most teachers from even having time to think about their lessons. This undefined group will be difficult to attract back to the profession, but it would be worthwhile trying to create recruitment conditions that could lead this contingent of former professional teachers to consider returning to the teaching profession.
6. We could save millions of euros for the Recovery and Resilience Plan applied to education, even considering the great investment in the digital training of teachers; if only part of that budget could be applied in training scholarships, this would allow young graduates to invest in a master's degree in teaching. (The same I would say for the CPD of in-service teachers, where it would also make sense to have training scholarships that would allow each teacher to choose the best offers to reinforce their qualification). Also because of the effect of the pandemic on the lives of many household economies, many potential candidates for entry to a master's degree in teaching simply drop out because they cannot afford the costs of tuition fees, travel and accommodation in places that are often far from their area of residence. This situation, which is getting worse, with many potential young candidates dropping out, could be solved with a training grant for many of them.

Beyond all these technical solutions, I conclude by insisting on the need to bear in mind a teacher training model that includes interaction between scientific research, educational training, and professional practice. This interaction between the different components of teacher training is our best achievement since the paradigm shift in 2006-07. There is not a single known indicator that recommends reversing this logic in which immersion in investigative practices is sacrificed for more general educational training and supervised practice on the job, away from the supervision of higher education institutions. The experience of investigating a subject directly related to professional practice carried out in the classroom, as has

been our option at NOVA FCSH, is a guaranteed learning experience, recognized by the students in training, far beyond the training period, because it also has the enormous advantage of allowing the acquisition of unique skills in action-research, reflective research, intercultural research and philosophical research among other modalities that, as a rule, are not lost in the professional path of the future teacher.

# e-TEALS

An **e**-journal of **T**eacher **E**ducation and **A**ppplied **L**anguage **S**tudies