

Literature and collaboration in the English language classroom in pandemic times

Literatura e colaboração na sala de aula de língua inglesa em tempos de pandemia

Literatura y colaboración en el aula de lengua inglesa en tiempos de pandemia



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Abstract: This paper analyzes four collaborative English classes conducted by a teacher from a public school who used fairy tales to teach remotely while exploring WhatsApp and social networks to keep students interested in the subject. To generate the data, we transcribed one of the ninth-grade students' interactions: an interview in which they expressed their impressions about the lessons and classroom observation notes. The results of the data analysis show that the students became highly motivated by having worked collaboratively because they could exchange opinions and points of view on the literary texts and better understand them by interacting with their peers.

Keywords: literature; collaboration; teaching; learning; technology.

¹ Francisco José Quaresma de Figueiredo thanks CNPq for their support, provided in the form of a Research Productivity Grant - Level 2.

Resumo: Este texto analisa quatro aulas colaborativas de inglês ministradas remotamente por um professor de uma escola pública que fez uso de contos de fada, empregando instrumentos como *WhatsApp* e redes sociais para motivar e manter os alunos interessados. Como material empírico, usamos uma das interações dos alunos da nona série: uma entrevista na qual expressaram suas impressões sobre as aulas, e notas de campo. Os resultados da análise dos dados demonstram que os alunos ficaram bastante motivados por terem trabalhado colaborativamente porque, ao interagir com os seus pares, podiam trocar opiniões e pontos de vista sobre os textos literários e desenvolver um melhor conhecimento sobre eles.

Palavras-chave: literatura; colaboração; ensino; aprendizagem; tecnologia.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza cuatro clases de inglés basadas en el trabajo colaborativo e impartidas por un maestro de una escuela pública, que utilizó cuentos de hadas para dar clases en línea, usando *WhatsApp* y las redes sociales para mantener a los estudiantes interesados. Para generar los datos, transcribimos una de las interacciones de los estudiantes de noveno año: una entrevista en la que expresaron sus impresiones sobre las clases y notas de campo. Los resultados del análisis de datos demuestran que los estudiantes se motivaron mucho por haber trabajado colaborativamente ya que, al interactuar con sus compañeros, pudieron intercambiar opiniones y puntos de vista sobre los textos literarios y desarrollar un mejor conocimiento sobre los mismos.

Palabras clave: literatura; colaboración; enseñanza; aprendizaje; tecnología.

Submitted on December 15, 2022.

Accepted on March 28, 2023.

Published on June 14, 2023.

Introduction

This article discusses the use of literature in the English language classroom during the pandemic. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators worldwide had to learn how to teach online and use different resources to keep students motivated during classes (AL-SAMIRI, 2021; FITRIA, 2021).

Many researchers defend and stress the positive effects of using literature in classes worldwide. By investigating this subject, one can observe different ideas about using tales, poetry, novels, etc., in classes. Collie and Slater (1987), Widdowson (1990), Tolentino (1996), Showalter (2007), Thaler (2008), and Araújo, Figueiredo and Lago (2020) are some of the authors who work with the pedagogic use of literature in language classes.

The idea of writing this text emerged when we began to prepare online English classes focused on fairy tales in a public school located in a small town called Novo Brasil² in Goiás State, Brazil. When the teacher started teaching the content, he observed that the students seemed highly motivated to read and comment on fairy tales. In the words of Thaler (2008, p. 20), “[f]airy tales and other stories with strong repetitive elements are types which our children are familiar with from their L1, and so they can focus on the language features more easily.”

Hence, we proposed that the students produce social posters while working in pairs, which would link the stories of fairy tales to the pandemic times. After doing it, they could express their opinions and feelings using pictures and writing compositions on COVID-19 on social networks. We agree with Carhill-Poza (2020, p. 32) that “teachers are central to the development of supportive, academically focused social networks through the classroom environment and activities that they create as well as by providing access to networks beyond the classroom.”

As the classes developed, we used the collaborative approach for interactions and social networking to post the material. This

² The names of the institutions and of the people involved in this study were replaced by fictitious ones, except for the name of the city.

article aims to expose and analyze four English classes in which literature was used in online classes.

This text is divided into three parts, besides the introduction and final remarks. Firstly, we address some aspects concerning the methodology used. Secondly, we discuss the importance of literature, the collaborative approach, and technology in English language teaching. Finally, we present the data and analyze them in the light of language teaching and learning theories.

The methodology and context of the research

This article recognizes a set of essential aspects to investigate the data produced by students in the classroom context. Such elements align with qualitative research. As Maxwell (2005, p. 115) claims, “qualitative research usually investigates a single setting or a small number of individuals or sites, using theoretical or purposeful rather than probability sampling.”

The locus of this research is a public school, and we examined only one group of students to collect the data. After their parents or guardians granted the teacher their authorization, the learners produced posters and were interviewed. The students signed informed assent forms, and the people responsible for them signed informed consent forms, which guaranteed they could stop participating whenever they saw fit. However, it is vital to note that “in choosing to co-operate (or not, as the case may be), the learners make a significant contribution to the management of the interaction that takes place in the classroom” (ALLWRIGHT; BAILEY, 2002, p. 19). Consequently, they can contribute to the improvement of future classes.

Regarding the context, this research arose from the pandemic moment lived by a teacher and his students from a public school in the countryside of Goiás State, Brazil. One of the consequences of the contagion effects of the COVID-19 pandemic was that all public and private schools had to make adaptations and teach their

classes by using technological devices. As some scholars argued, electronic devices could contribute to the teaching of courses (BARTON; LEE, 2015; CARVALHO; SOARES, 2020; FITRIA, 2021).

Decree No. 9.634, established by Governor Caiado's administration, states that all public institutions had to close their doors temporarily and that their employees had to work from home (home office) from March 13th, 2020. In Novo Brasil, most teachers needed to learn how to teach classes using Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Google Forms, WhatsApp, e-mail, etc. The ones they were more familiar with were e-mail and WhatsApp. As Rosa (2013, p. 214) asserts, "the use of technologies is still a challenge for many teachers."³

Therefore, they needed more time to learn how to teach remotely using the internet, technological devices, and apps. These actions substantially impacted the school because some students lived on farms, and many could not have classes remotely due to the lack of internet access. As a result, besides having online lessons, they received tasks at home, with written explanations, and they tried to do the exercises by themselves and with their parents or guardians' help. When they finished the activities, they sent them to the teachers for feedback.

For the aforementioned reasons, the students that live on farms did not participate in this research. By the time of this investigation, the learners who participated in it belonged to a ninth-grade group of twenty students, although only seven accepted to participate. They interacted virtually by using WhatsApp and Google Meet. In Table 1, we present some information about them:

Table 1 – Students' profiles

| Participants | Sex | Age |
|---------------------|--------|-----|
| 1 - Cinderela | Female | 12 |
| 2 - Bela Adormecida | Female | 11 |
| 3 - Zangado | Male | 13 |

³ To make the reading of the text easier, we translated all the texts and excerpts in Portuguese into English.

| | | |
|---------------|--------|----|
| 4 - Aladim | Male | 14 |
| 5 - Drizella | Female | 13 |
| 6 - Anastasia | Female | 11 |
| 7 - Charming | Male | 15 |

Source: Drawn up by the authors.

The students who partook in this research had always studied in Novo Brasil. They had not travelled to an English-speaking country and only attended public schools. Therefore, they probably only had primary contact with the English language at school. In Table 2, we display the information about the teacher that worked with them:

Table 2 - Teacher's profile

| Participant | Sex | Age | City | Education |
|-------------|------|-----|--------------------|--|
| Henry | Male | 46 | Novo Brasil, Goiás | Bachelor's degree in Applied Linguistics; Master's degree in Literature and PhD student in Linguistics |

Source: Drawn up by the authors.

With this in mind, we stress that qualitative research focuses on studying "people in their natural settings, to identify how their experiences and behavior are shaped by the context of their lives, such as the social, economic, cultural or physical context in which they live" (HENNINK; HUTTER; BAILEY, 2011, p. 8). This investigation was carried out by considering the students' context to apply the contents that would be feasible to be worked on and taught in online classes. Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011, p. 8) assert that "qualitative research also seeks to embrace and understand the contextual influences on the research issues."

The content of this research focuses on fairy tales. The teacher used WhatsApp and social networks to motivate the students and to keep them interested. This study drew on the collaborative approach to promote the interaction between peers. WhatsApp,

e-mail, and social networks such as Facebook and Instagram were utilized to post the students' posters.

The data were generated in 4 classes being 2 classes a day per week in the second semester of 2020. The students read the stories in English from adapted and simplified books (Longman Classics) at home and, during the lessons, they had to produce posters linking the fairy tales with the pandemic times. Since the students needed to be more fluent in English, the teacher's interaction with them occurred in English and Portuguese.

To start the poster production activities, the teacher brainstormed with the students by asking them questions to find out what they knew about fairy tales. Then he explained to them in English what they had to do to produce the posters and translated the guidelines into Portuguese to ensure the students understood them. The students initially wrote the messages to be posted on the posters in Portuguese and, using the dictionary and Google translator, translated them into English. The teacher would then check the English text and correct it where necessary.

To analyze the data, we transcribed one of the ninth-grade students' interactions, a task done by the learners, an interview in which they expressed their impressions about the classes, and classroom observation notes. In the next section, we present some theories and their importance to this research.

In light of the theories: some considerations

In this research, we use three different approaches to build up an overarching theoretical framework: a) studies on the use of literature in the language classroom, as we drew on the literary text as content; b) a collaborative approach to think in terms of interactions between the students and the teacher; and c) theories of educational technologies applied to teaching and learning, as the educator and the learners used many technological devices to study and to do the tasks proposed during this pandemic moment. Therefore, in this section, we first discuss the contributions of

literature and literary texts to the learning process of an additional language, then address the collaborative approach, and finally concentrate on the benefits of technology to the classroom.

To start these discussions, it is necessary first to consider the polysemic aspect of the word *literature*. This word has been used in different contexts to focus on distinct things, for instance, to indicate the name of a discipline, a collection of science studies in other areas, the origin of literary texts produced in particular countries (American literature, British literature, Brazilian literature, etc.). As Eagleton (2008, p. 1) asseverates, “[t]here have been various attempts to define literature”. Besides the variety of meanings, there is also the matter of what content might be considered literary and for which reasons.

However, the conception of literature in this article refers to the text as a uniquely elaborated artifact that can be used differently for distinct reasons. We show some ways of using literary texts to teach English. In line with our purposes, Collie and Slater (1987, p. 5) underline that “above all, literature can be helpful in the language learning process because of the personal involvement it fosters in readers.”

Throughout the history of teaching and learning foreign languages, literature has been an important tool to increase motivation and provide students with perspectives of foreign cultures. Accordingly, for Collie and Slater (1987, p. 4), “literature is perhaps best seen as a complement to other materials used to increase the foreign learner’s insight into the country whose language is being learned.”

As it is commonly stressed, addressing cultural aspects is particularly important when teaching and learning other languages. In this respect, using literary texts in classes can facilitate understanding a foreign language culture and its daily use. Collie and Slater (1987), Widdowson (1990), Showalter (2007), Thaler (2008), and Lago (2016, 2017) discuss some other important aspects of the use of literature in English language classes: students

acquire knowledge about culture and differences; by reading literary texts, learners stimulate their imagination; students can improve their reading and writing skills; and learners can better understand figurative language.

Regarding figurative language, metaphors are complex to teach in a foreign language, and literary texts have plenty of them. Concerning this discussion, Collie and Slater (1987), Widdowson (1990), Tolentino (1996), Showalter (2007), and Thaler (2008) defend not only the translation of the literary text in classes but also an extensive investigation into the explicit and implicit aspects of each line. Thus, they suggest exploring elements that revolve around language and create cultural specificities in the text. In Widdowson's (1990, p. 83) words, "the study of literature is primarily a study of language use and as such, it is not a separate activity from language learning but an aspect of the same activity".

Tolentino (1996) recommends using literature in English classes in public schools because students can also gain knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, and culture. Moreover, one can compare and enlarge their worldview when learning about a foreign culture. To use literature in language classes, teachers must be motivated, have high self-esteem, like to read and adopt an attitude of receptivity towards the literary text. However, we highlight that, "[b]y receptivity, we do not mean merely a passive acceptance; rather we mean an active openness, a willingness to encounter the language and the culture(s) it represents" (ALLWRIGHT; BAILEY, 2002, p. 23).

The content is as important as the approach educators choose to teach, for the latter can ensure good results or not. A collaborative approach is an excellent option for teaching different subjects because students can interact more with one another and learn even more with their teachers' help. Many researchers worldwide have worked with collaborative learning and emphasized its positive effects in the language classroom. Nunan (1992), Donato and McCormick (1994), Dillenbourg (1999) and Figueiredo (1999,

2008, 2018, 2019) underscore the benefits of working together. As Figueiredo (2018, p. 14) states,

[c]ollaborative learning is a philosophical approach that [...] refers to educational situations in which two or more people learn or try to learn something together, whether through interactions in the classroom or outside, or through interactions mediated by the computer, whose emphasis falls on the co-construction of knowledge within and from these interactions.

Based on Figueiredo's (2018) arguments, we concluded that this approach would be valuable and effective in these pandemic days because, employing the computer, the cell phone, and the internet, the students would have the chance to interact, collaborate and co-construct knowledge.

Research has shown that collaborative learning is grounded in the sociocultural theory proposed by Vygotsky and his collaborators (FIGUEIREDO, 2018, 2019; OXFORD, 1997). According to the sociocultural view, social interaction is a prerequisite to learning and cognitive development (FIGUEIREDO, 2019; LANTOLF, 2000; OXFORD, 1997).

According to Vygotsky (1981), the child goes through three cognitive development stages:

- a. object-regulation: the environment exerts its influence on the child;
- b. other-regulation: the child can carry out specific tasks, but only with appropriate linguistically mediated assistance from a parent or older and more capable peer;
- c. self-regulation: the child independently develops some strategies to perform a specific task.

According to Lantolf and Appel (1994), the transition from other-regulation, or intermental activity, to self-regulation, or intramental activity, is favored by support strategies – known as scaffolding⁴ –, which take place in the zone of proximal development⁵ where the child and the adult engage in an interaction.

Given the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the different studies undertaken by the psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), students will probably learn more things when working collaboratively. That is even more real if one considers what they know and what they can learn in collaboration and observing their environment. For Nunan (1992, p. 12), “collaboration and self-regulation are important constructs in building an understanding of how learners come to control the target language.”

So how can we use literature by relying on the collaborative approach in these pandemic days? Teachers have been using many technological devices connected to the internet to teach their lessons. Discussions on the efficiency of using those resources for language teaching have become commonplace worldwide (AL-SAMIRI, 2021; CHAPELE; SAURO, 2020; FIGUEIREDO, 2018; FITRIA, 2021; PAIVA, 2001).

Therefore, relying on technology in classroom contexts grows in importance each day. Belloni (1998), Almeida and Silva (2011), Valarmathi (2011), Barrs (2012), Figueiredo (2018), Chapele and Sauro (2020), Tiraboschi, Figueiredo and Araújo (2020), among others, offer teachers many possibilities of using technology to teach different subjects. As Figueiredo (2018, p. 34) states,

[...] language learning can also take place beyond the walls of a classroom, in the virtual environment. By using the desktop computer or mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, or notebooks) connected to the internet, learners

4 The term “scaffolding” comes from the works of Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) and is used as a metaphor to describe the support given to a younger learner by an older, more experienced adult.

5 The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is defined as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (VYGOTSKY, 1978, p. 86).

will be able to interact with others in different parts of the world and, through this interaction, learn or practice conversation in a foreign language.

These assertions stress the importance of using new technologies in class and indicate how to apply them. Nonetheless, learning to use technological devices is a great challenge for students and teachers (AL-SAMIRI, 2021; BARTON; LEE, 2015; CARVALHO; SOARES, 2020). The school in question, located in Novo Brasil, is accustomed to in-person or face-to-face classes – thus relying on blackboards, chalks, notebooks, pens, pencils, etc. However, when the teachers noticed that the only way to keep working was by using technological devices connected to the internet, they had to read about these topics and improve their skills at utilizing technologies.

Technology-enhanced practices have revolutionized the way languages are learned and taught. Especially over the last thirty years, the field of language learning, aligned with technology research and application, has branched out into many areas, for example, interactive and collaborative technologies, corpora and data-driven learning, computer gaming, and tailor-designed tools, to name but a few (FARR; MURRAY, 2016).

Teachers have endured many difficulties and distressing moments during the pandemic. Nevertheless, in the next section, we share some positive examples of our classroom experience in which we relied on collaboration and technological resources to address fairy tales with students from a ninth-grade group at a small public school.

Analysis and comments about data collecting

Students want to learn foreign languages for several reasons, so they might use different strategies. These strategies relate to approaches, teaching resources, contents, etc. According to Ellis (2004, p. 2), “all teachers have a theory of language learning. That is, they act following a set of principles about the way language learners behave.”

Moreover, teachers need to be good readers, motivated, confident, and hopeful about their work in class. When educators choose a topic to work on in a foreign language classroom, they need to consider that some students might like it and others might not. Then, relying on different contents and approaches is necessary to capture students' attention. Oliveira (2017, p. 56) points out that "[t]he teacher, the students, the material, the structure of the class can contribute to the real success of the class." We reinforce that literature provides good content to teach languages for reasons like those mentioned.

However, when choosing a novel, a play, a tale, poetry, etc., teachers need to consider their students' participation in expressing their opinions on the subject. Otherwise, they might not enjoy the experience as much as they could. Once the teacher who participated in this research decided to work with fairy tales in the classroom, he followed some stages. As suggested by Thaler (2008), firstly he asked the ninth-grade students some questions such as:

- Do you like stories with princesses and princes?
- Do you like reading stories about witches and fairies?
- What kind of fairy tales do you know?
- What fairy tale movie have you watched?

As previously mentioned, the teacher used English and Portuguese in class since the students needed to be more fluent in English. So, these questions were initially asked in English by the teacher and then translated into Portuguese by him. The students gave different answers to these questions, and hence we perceived that they needed to learn more about traditional fairy tales. Through their answers, we learned they knew more about the modern ones, like *Interstellar Cinderella*, by Deborah Underwood, *Snoring Beauty*, by Bruce Hale, and *Three Little Fish and the Big Bad Shark*, by Ken Geist.

In view thereof, the educator decided to work with traditional tales written by the Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault – *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, etc. Another motivation for using fairy tales was the one provided by Coelho (1987, p. 75), according to whom,

[t]here is no doubt that, without this sea of wonderful narratives, which have covered humanity since the beginning of time, life on Earth would have been quite different: it could hardly be seen and felt in the essentiality and grandeur that are inherent to it and which, unfortunately, not everyone can find out.

Engaged in offering the students the possibility of knowing the traditional fairy tales, the teacher started the class by showing some topics about the Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault's biography. He then explained the elements of a fairy tale and the difference between this genre and other literary ones, displaying an animated cartoon produced by Disney to show the main components in the narratives that could contribute to their learning of English. As was previously discussed, fairy tales are full of repetitive elements, and the students are used to this kind of genre because they are familiar with this kind of literature from their L1 (THALER, 2008).

Next, the teacher told the students to carefully read the tales and answer 20 questions to take a quiz in the following class on the stories read. This task was necessary because its purpose was to familiarize the students with the narratives. At the end of it, the teacher would then ask about the moral lesson of each story. According to Koban (2014, p. 116), "[f]airy tales are not only important tools for teachers to teach their students morals and values, but they also give students room for creative expression."

These classes promoted many interactions between the learners. The teacher divided the students into groups. They accessed Google Meet to talk about the stories and answer the questions. They took a quiz and learned a lot about the content

proposed. Thus, once students are involved in doing this kind of collaborative assignment in class, they might perceive that language learning means much more than knowing vocabulary and syntax: they have the opportunity to speak and use the language they are learning in meaningful interactions. As Cândido Junior (2018, p. 59) states,

[L]earning a second language requires much more than knowing its structural dimensions. Learners need to acquire skills that allow them to express values, beliefs, ideas, through this language, in an appropriate way, in a context of interpersonal relationships, in which several variables are in constant interaction, such as affective, ideological, political factors.

After this moment, the teacher exemplified some elements of English grammar, especially some related to the simple past and present perfect tenses. Then, he asked the students to do some other tasks in groups of three people. The learners interacted via WhatsApp to do the exercises. Afterward, they returned to the online classroom, and the teacher corrected everything.

As the reader will see throughout the analysis, the students enjoyed studying the contents of fairy tales. Every student in the class was motivated and displayed good self-esteem. First, the learners said they would like to do a task related to the fairy tales they had read. Then, the teacher proposed that the learners produce something to show their drawing skills and write a message to raise people's awareness of COVID-19. They were invited to work in groups, interact, and help one another to do the task (FIGUEIREDO, 2018, 2019; LANTOLF, 2000; VYGOTSKY, 1978). The students had to work with fairy tales, create connections between them and Covid-19 and post their productions on the internet, specifically on social networks. Although that was a challenge, the learners interacted in pairs and groups and did the task with flying colors.

The following excerpt⁶ is an example of the interaction between two students on Google Meet while they were doing their assignment:

[1]

Cinderela: Hi, my friend! Vamos dividir as coisas para a gente terminar mais rápido? [*Hi my friend! Shall we split things up so we can finish faster?*]

Bela Adormecia: Hello! Acho melhor não dividirmos [...]. O professor disse para a gente fazer o máximo que pudéssemos juntas, mesmo não estando presencial, e sim on-line. Não é isso, professor? [*Hello! I think it's better not to split [...]. The teacher told us to do as much as we could together, even though we are not working face-to-face, but online. Isn't that right, teacher?*]

Teacher: Sim, devem trabalhar em dupla se ajudando, mas cada um deve fazer o seu. [*Yes, you must work in pairs helping each other, but each one must do their own part.*]

Cinderela: OK, então vamos fazendo juntas. Enquanto você vai esboçando os cartazes, eu vou procurar boas frases em inglês na internet para usarmos. [*OK, so let's do it together. While you're sketching the posters, I'm going to look up good English phrases on the internet for us to use.*]

Bela Adormecida: Simmmm, acho que fizemos uma boa parceria, pois gosto e tenho mais facilidade com desenhos e você sempre foi melhor em inglês. Podemos trabalhar em parceria realmente. [*Yesssss, I think we made a good partnership, because I like and I find it easier with drawings and you've always been better in English. We can really work in pairs.*]

Teacher: Parabéns, garotas! Observando vocês interagindo, vejo que vocês conseguirão ótimos resultados com essa parceria. [*Congratulations, girls! By watching you interact, I can see that you will achieve great results with this partnership.*]

Source: Material generated during the class.

⁶ The interactions were kept in Portuguese and translated into English by the authors of this paper.

After the learners and the educator talked on Google Meet and WhatsApp, all the students had ideas to draw their posters and write messages to post on their social networks. The students drew some characters from fairy tales in the posters below (Figure 1) and created specific messages to raise people's awareness of COVID-19. The teacher helped them by answering their questions and correcting their sentences while producing the material.

Figure 1 – COVID-19 Awareness Posters 1



Source: Material produced by Cinderella and Bela Adormecida.

The posters produced by Cinderella and Bela Adormecida and their answers in the interview indicate the importance of a good lesson plan based on the collaborative approach (FIGUEIREDO, 2018; OLIVEIRA, 2017). Comments such as the ones presented below clearly show the relevance of the studies done by Vygotsky and his collaborators. As one can notice, interaction and collaboration pervaded the classes, and the students learned the content and how to cooperate and negotiate ways to work together. For example, the following answers were given by the students who produced the posters shown in figure 1:

[2]

Gostei muito do conteúdo proposto pelo professor. Ao fazer as atividades ao longo da aula, eu fiquei motivada em poder contar com a ajuda de minha colega “Bela Adormecida”, pois, do contrário, acho que eu não conseguiria. Ela tem habilidades em desenho, e eu conheço mais de inglês. Assim, acho que fizemos uma boa parceria. (Cinderela)

[I really liked the content proposed by the teacher. When doing the tasks throughout the class, I was motivated by the opportunity to count on the help of my colleague “Bela Adormecida” because otherwise, I don’t think I would be able to do the task. She has drawing skills, and I am good at English. So, I think we made a good partnership.]

[3]

Não foi fácil realizar o presente trabalho, pois minha internet não é muito boa, e teve momentos em que quase desisti de fazê-la. Mas Cinderela me apoiou, e o professor nos motivou a realizar o trabalho, pois iria ser importante para ele mostrar o nosso esforço. Eu estou feliz com o resultado. Obrigado, professor, por não me deixar desistir. (Bela Adormecida)

[It was not easy to carry out this work, as my internet is not very good, and there were moments when I almost gave up on doing it. But Cinderella helped me, and the teacher motivated us to do the work, as it would be important for him to show our effort. I am happy with the result. Thank you, teacher, for not letting me give up.]

Source: Interview with the students.

Similarly, Zangado and Aladim, two motivated students who created the posters below (Figure 2), worked hard and showed the importance of using technology in the classroom. Utilizing smartphones and social networks can motivate students and help them be more productive (FIGUEIREDO, 2018; VALARMATHI, 2011).

Below we present the posters produced by these learners and their answers given during the interview:

Figure 2 – COVID-19 Awareness Posters 2



Source: Material produced by Zangado and Aladim.

[4]

Eu gostei muito da forma como o professor trabalhou o conteúdo “contos de fadas” com a gente. Eu aprendi muitas palavras novas e pude socializar com meus colegas por meio do *WhatsApp* durante a realização da atividade. (Zangado)

[I really liked the way the teacher worked the “fairy tales” content with us. I learned a lot of new words and was able to socialize with my colleagues through WhatsApp during the task.]

[5]

Foi um momento incrível, pois nas aulas presenciais nós nunca tínhamos nos despertado para essa forma de aprender inglês – usando as redes sociais e socializando

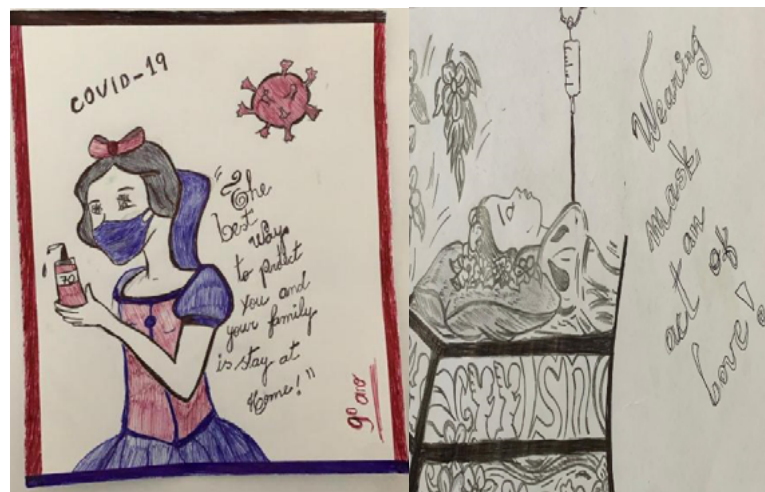
com outras pessoas, além de poder conscientizar sobre os perigos do COVID-19. (Aladim)

[It was an incredible moment because, in the classroom, we had never taken into consideration this way of learning English – using social networks and socializing with other people, besides being able to raise awareness of the dangers of COVID-19.]

Source: Interview with the students.

Drizella, Anastasia, and Charming produced posters (Figure 3) expressing determination and motivation for the exercise proposed. They accessed Google Meet and interacted with each other and with the teacher. Besides their posters, we present their speeches in which they express their satisfaction with the content and with the teacher's class planning:

Figure 3 – COVID-19 Awareness Posters 3



Source: Material produced by Drizella, Anastasia, and Charming.

[6]

Gosto muito de literatura e de temas sociais, e poder juntar esses dois temas nas aulas de inglês foi muito interessante. Talvez isso seja o que o professor chama de literatura utilitária. (Drizella)

[I really like literature and social topics, and being able to bring these two topics together in English classes was very interesting. Perhaps this is what the professor calls utilitarian literature.]

[7]

Confesso que, no início, achei que seria chato, mas, à medida que fui vendo meus colegas postarem seus trabalhos no Instagram e no Facebook, eu vi que eu também podia fazer algo diferente e logo percebi que o trabalho valeu a pena. (Anastasia)

[I must admit that, at first, I thought it would be boring, but as I watched my colleagues post their work on Instagram and Facebook, I saw that I could do something different too, and I soon realized that the work was worth it.]

[8]

Agora que o professor nos motivou para a possibilidade de produção de cartazes, eu quero fazer outros para postar nas redes sociais, porque assim eu sei que estarei contribuindo para esse momento tão difícil de pandemia. (Charming)

[Now that the teacher has motivated us for the possibility of producing posters, I want to make other posters to post on social media because that way, I know I'll be contributing to this very difficult moment of the pandemic.]

Source: Interview with the students.

All the students voiced positive opinions about using literature and collaboration during these pandemic days. Therefore, we agree with Figueiredo (2018, p. 31) when he affirms that, by engaging in activities such as the ones exposed in this study, “students have the opportunity to become more reflective and more autonomous, since, through the exchange of information and points of view, and regulation by the other, they can become self-regulated.”

This research reinforces the importance of interaction in language learning. Not only did the students express, in the interview, many positive aspects of these moments of collaborative work, but also the teacher in his classroom observation notes:

[9]

I need to stress the positive results of the collaborative approach in my classes. Although I love literature, I had some difficulties working with fairy tales because of the vocabulary and metaphors in this kind of text. When I started my work with the students in the online classes, by relying on pair works and interaction, I could see the students' improvement in vocabulary acquisition and cooperation, especially when I noticed that some more knowledgeable students could help others with the exercises. (Teacher Henry)

Source: Classroom observation notes.

The use of fairy tales, the collaborative approach, and technology in English classes motivated the students to study the language during the pandemic. Based on this study, despite the trying times we have been living, we highlight that many students and teachers are doing the best they can. This investigation shows exemplary results of such an effort.

This research underlines how vital a teacher's engagement in foreign language learning is. Furthermore, once we consider the students and the teacher's utterances, we can perceive that they enjoyed and would like to keep using the collaborative approach in class.

Final remarks

This article contributes to teachers and researchers since it connects the use of literature, collaborative learning, and new technologies. We remind the reader that the participants

of this study live in a small city of Goiás State, in Brazil. Some of the learners did not seem to believe in themselves and used to question the reasons for studying English at school at the beginning of the investigation.

Many different beliefs about teaching and learning English as a foreign language in school exist. Nevertheless, by the end of the research, once literature, the collaborative approach, and technology were used to teach the lessons to the ninth-grade group, we could perceive changes in the learners' behavior towards the subject.

When the teacher proposed to do those tasks, the students did not believe they could write or create something in English. Then, he talked to them on Google Meet and showed how good this work could be for their school and region. The learners who volunteered voiced their willingness to do the tasks, despite their difficulties, from the outset.

From the explanations provided by the teacher to the execution of the exercises and production of the posters, it was observable how collaborative work was influential in the language classroom – the students could discuss, exchange ideas, improve their vocabulary, and gradually learn with and from each other. Finally, the interviews with the students underscore their enjoyment in participating in this study, for they could work with their classmates and produce something meaningful for them.

As educators, we should understand the relationship between collaborative learning and social support, especially in the challenging moments of the pandemic we have been going through. Therefore, we must promote a learning environment where the students can interact with one another in a meaningful, collaborative and supportive way so that they can perceive that collaboration should be a routine part of their academic and personal life.

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