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**YOUNG LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES ON
SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING**

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To my wonderful and supporting family.
Thank you for your encouragement and patience.
I love you.

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ABSTRACT

This monograph presents a research carried out with my second graders in a private school in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Considering that affect plays a major role in the language learning process, this research, guided by the principles of Exploratory Practice, aims at understanding young learners' perspectives on second language learning, and how they feel about learning English. Through a series of classroom activities, my students and I had the opportunity to reflect about their reasons for learning English as a second language and to discuss their feelings related not only to the language but also to the classroom. As a result, we concluded that the importance we give to affect in our classes establishes how meaningful our teaching and our students' learning can be.

Keywords: Affect, Exploratory Practice, language learning, young learners, understanding.

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RESUMO

Esta monografia apresenta uma pesquisa feita com os meus alunos do segundo ano de uma escola privada na cidade do Rio de Janeiro. Considerando que afeto tem um papel muito importante no aprendizado de uma língua, esta pesquisa, guiada pelos princípios da Prática Exploratória, tem como objetivo entender as perspectivas de jovens estudantes sobre o aprendizado de uma segunda língua, e como eles se sentem sobre o aprendizado de Inglês. Através de uma série de atividades pedagógicas, os meus alunos e eu tivemos a oportunidade de refletir sobre seus motivos para aprender Inglês como segunda língua e de discutir sobre seus sentimentos relacionados não apenas à linguagem, mas também à sala de aula. Como consequência, nós concluímos que a importância que nós damos ao afeto em nossas aulas estabelece o quão significativo pode ser o nosso ensino e o aprendizado dos nossos alunos.

Palavras-chave: Afeto, Prática Exploratória, aprendizado de língua, jovens aprendizes, entendimento.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	9
2. Theoretical background	11
2.1 Language learning	11
2.2 Affect and language learning	11
2.3 Affect and teaching	12
2.4 Affective factors	14
2.4.1 Anxiety	14
2.4.2 Inhibition	15
2.4.3 Self-esteem	15
2.4.4 Motivation	16
3. Methodology	17
3.1 Exploratory Practice in language teaching and learning	17
3.2 Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities - PEPAs	19
4. Analysis and reflections	20
5. Conclusion	35
6. References	37
7. Appendices	40

People don't care how much we know until they know how much we care.

Theodore Roosevelt

Introduction

Many parents enroll their kids in English courses or bilingual schools wishing they learn a second language since very little. As an English teacher working in a private school, I have noticed an increase, in the last few years, in the number of parents who are willing to pay a lot of money so their children become bilingual. Despite their lack of information about bilingual education and what exactly means to be bilingual, they still want their kids to attain this goal. Moreover, they have no regard to what such young learners might think about it.

Throughout my teaching career, I have noticed that many students usually say they cannot speak and/or read in English at all, even though, most of the times, they actually can. That made me wonder how they feel about the English language and their own productions. The desire to understand my students' feelings and perspectives was my motivation for carrying out research on affect.

This paper aims at understanding young learners' perspectives on second language learning and how they feel about learning English as a second language. Therefore, my research question is: How do my students feel about learning English as a second language? This research was conducted with my second grade students who take part of a bilingual program. There are fifteen students in this class, from which 7 are girls and 8 are boys, and they are between 7 and 8 years old. They are very talkative, but only a few of them really try to express themselves in English. There is a boy with autism in this class. He does not participate very much, but it is possible to see his language development as he manages to do the activities many times by himself. The data was collected through Exploratory Practice with a few classroom activities as Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPA).

The research was conducted in a traditional upper middle class school in Rio de Janeiro. It used to have English classes twice a week as part of the mandatory curriculum and an optional five times a week model, in the form of extracurricular classes. However, in 2016, a bilingual program was installed in partnership with a private institution. Students who become part of the bilingual program stay a little longer at school since they have five English classes a week as part of the curriculum. They also have Robotics and Swimming classes, they have lunch and they also do extra practice activities related to all the other subjects. There is a library but only with books in Portuguese. Their classroom is white and big and there are no ornaments or posters in Portuguese or English on

the walls. The English classes have the duration of 60 minutes and they are conducted using the CLIL approach. CLIL stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning and it sustains that language should be taught in the context of other subjects, which can be school subjects like Science and Math, or other meaningful content such as human values or ecological awareness. Therefore, the language knowledge is taught inductively around subject content.

The Bilingual Program is based on transdisciplinary themes which were developed by analyzing UNESCO's Five Pillars of Education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, learning to live together, and learning to transform oneself and society. The students learn specific skills and contents and relate them to the themes through a universal understanding and an essential question. Universal understandings are statements summarizing universal ideas that go beyond time and space. These ideas allow students to find meaning and integrate skills to real life situations. Students explore them through essential questions. An essential question is open-ended and motivates them to inquire about the universal understanding. The question is addressed throughout the bimester and culminates in a project.

This paper is organized into five chapters. The first is the introduction of the research. The second chapter contains the definition of language and affect. It also explains the importance of affect in the language learning process. The third one explains how Exploratory Practice can help us develop understanding from practice in the classroom and it presents the Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs) used to collect data in the classroom. The fourth reveals the analysis and my own understandings related to how my students feel about learning English as a second language. The fifth presents my conclusions based on the analysis.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Language learning

Although language is all around us, little do we know about it as it is the most complex of all human phenomena (NUNAN, 2007). Despite the extensive research made throughout the years, there is not a single answer to define it as it is many things.

Saussure (2011) sees language as a closed and complex structural system consisting of rules which relate particular signs to particular meanings. However, Chomsky (1968) believes language is a set of internalized rules. He affirms that language is a product of rule formation and it is fundamentally innate to all human beings. Nonetheless, Halliday (1978) sees language as a social phenomenon since it is a resource for making meaning and being able to communicate. For him, learning a language is learning how to mean.

Therefore, depending on one's concept of language, the learning goals may change completely and it might be a cause for anxiety.

2.2 Affect and language learning

The term affect has been broadly used in different ways in the literature. Oatley and Jenkins affirm that it is used to refer to a wide range of phenomena, such as emotions, moods, feelings and attitude, which can influence a person's behavior (OATLEY; JENKINS, 1996, p.124). Arnold and Brown (1999) state that it refers to aspects of our emotional selves. Thus, according to Stevick (1999), "...one's affect toward a particular thing or action or situation or experience is how that thing or that action or that situation or that experience fits in with one's needs and purposes, and its resulting effect on one's emotion." In the current research, the term affect will be used to refer to aspects of feeling, attitude, emotion or mood that can have an impact on behavior (ARNOLD, BROWN, 1999).

Stevick (1980, p.4) affirms that, success in language learning depends much more on the intrinsic and extrinsic relationships in a classroom than on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses. Students should feel comfortable not only with themselves but also with their peers, so they can feel free to experiment with language and make mistakes. Therefore, affective aspects are of

paramount importance in the language learning process and not understood as opposed to cognitive aspects. According to Damasio (1994), there is evidence which confirms that emotions are part of reason for that on a neurobiological level. He declares that “certain aspects of the process of emotion and feeling are indispensable for rationality” (DAMASIO, 1994). Moreover, LeDoux (1996), a neural scientist, regards cognition and emotion as partners in the mind. Such considerations suggest that, when affect is taken into consideration, the language learning goals may be more easily accomplished.

It is said that stimulating students’ positive emotional responses may facilitate the learning process. On the other hand, whenever there are negative emotions involved, students may not reach their full learning potential. Damasio (1994) establishes five major emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust. Goleman (1995) divides the emotions in different categories: anger, sadness, fear, enjoyment, love, surprise, disgust, and shame.

Goleman (1995) goes further to affirm that the Western civilization has been so focused on its rational side that, as a consequence, it suffers from a state of ‘emotional illiteracy’. He advocates that the key to change this is bringing mind and heart together in order to educate the student as a whole. Ehrman (1998, p.102) also states that “it has become increasingly evident that the purpose of classroom learning is not only to convey content information”. Therefore, there are definitely opportunities to deal with affect in a language learning classroom that focuses on meaningful interaction.

2.3 Affect and teaching

As previously mentioned, the affective domain has been overcast in the field of language teaching by cognitive learning and building of knowledge, since they have been considered of greater importance. According to Rogers (1975, p.40-41), “they have focused so intently on the cognitive and have limited themselves so completely to educating from the neck up, that this narrowness is resulting in serious social consequences.”

Nonetheless, many considerations about this domain and its relevance to teaching have been made throughout the years, most of them influenced by humanistic movements. One of the most memorable among them was the Confluent Education movement. The theorists who took part on it, as George Isaac Brown (1971) and Gloria Castillo (1973), emphasized the need to bring the

affective and cognitive domains together so that people would be educated as a whole.

In the 1970's, some methods which came from psychology and psycholinguistic theories such as Suggestopedia, Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response took into account the affective side of language learning in a very central way. (ARNOLD; BROWN, 1999) As a reaction to structuralistic views and to methods such as the Audiolingual, which were not really concerned with the role of affect in the language learning process, and which were not successful in teaching learners to communicate, the Communicative Language Teaching approach emerged. "Communicative Language Teaching appealed to those who sought a more humanistic approach to teaching, one in which the interactive process of communication received priority" (RICHARDS; RODGERS, 1986, p. 83).

The Natural Approach, which was developed by Krashen and Terrel (1983), highlights the affective factors. One of the hypotheses in Krashen's theory of Second Language Acquisition is the affective filter. If it is "up", little or no acquisition will take place regardless of how meaningful and communicative the exercise is intended to be (KRASHEN, 1981). The activities based on the Natural Approach are thought to reduce stress and anxiety.

A more humanistic approach to language does not imply that we replace teaching the second language by other activities, but rather to add the affective domain in order to enrich the learning process. (ARNOLD, 1998) Some beliefs of humanistic and affect conscious methods:

- Language learning should take place in a low-anxiety atmosphere.
- Opportunities for learners to succeed and thus raise their confidence should be built into classroom activities.
- The learner should be considered holistically: cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects.
- Language learning should involve personally meaningful experience.
- Learner knowledge and resources should be drawn upon and autonomy is to be favored and developed.

(ARNOLD, 2011, p. 12)

The role of affect is taken into account in many different ways in a learner-centered language curriculum. Learners are affected by their own feelings and do not learn when stressed or anxious. As Gross (1992, p. 139) affirms, "We can accelerate and enrich our learning, by engaging the senses, emotions, imagination." He emphasizes the importance of whole-brain learning that recognizes affect as essential in the learning process.

Although students are subjected to the same stimuli, each one of them processes information differently because of the influence of affective factors. These factors have direct impact in their cognitive learning. Nonetheless, these differences tend to disappear in the group most of the times as most methods focus on the group and not on the learner as an individual. Dewaele (2005) affirms that personality and identity are also very important to the learning process and that recognizing students' psychological differences promotes a better understanding of their uniqueness in the group.

Attention to affect will not grant a solution to all learning problems, nor should we be less concerned with the cognitive aspects. However, language teachers who focus at times on the affective factors can profit very much (ARNOLD, 1999). To those teachers who state that these issues are not part of their obligations, Underhill (1989, p.252) adverts that "teachers who claim it is not their job to take these phenomena into account may miss out on some of the most essential ingredients in the management of successful learning".

2.4 Affective factors

As mentioned before, in the affect domain there are some learner-intrinsic factors which can influence one's learning and they are called affective factors. They can be positive, the ones which should be fostered, and they can be negative, the ones which should be dealt with. Anxiety, inhibition, low self-esteem, fear, stress, and anger are some examples of negative emotions which are capable of undermining our learning. In addition, as Arnold and Brown (1999, p. 8) noted "the various emotions affecting language learning are intertwined and interrelated in ways that make it impossible to isolate completely the influence of any one of them." The following sections will deal with some affective factors which are important for second language learning.

2.4.1 Anxiety

Anxiety is considered the most common obstacle for students to overcome in the language learning process. It is usually related to negative feelings such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, and tension. Learning a second language can make them feel quite vulnerable since it can be challenging

for people to express themselves when they do not master the vehicle of communication. (ARNOLD; BROWN, 1999) Anxiety makes learners feel nervous and fearful which leads to poor performance as it makes them feel worried. "Worry wastes energy that should be used for memory and processing on a type of thinking which in no way facilitates the task at hand" (EYSENCK, 1979).

Anxiety is also responsible for lack of participation in the classroom. High levels of anxiety make students avoid activities which require communication or that entail potential peer or teacher evaluation. As a result, they miss out the benefits of interactive learning experiences (WOLFE, 2005).

2.4.2 Inhibition

Making mistakes is a part of any language learning process. However, as students get older they tend to feel more inhibited, which prevents them from participating of the activities freely. Inhibition makes them feel self-conscious and afraid of taking risks with the language. Therefore, teachers must be aware of that and pay close attention to how they deal with error correction in the class as it can lead to negative affect and become a threat to the learning process.

Moreover, it is important to be aware that there is a difference between inhibition and introversion. Introvert students are not necessarily poor learners. They can have great inner strength of character and may show high degrees of empathy, which are features of a good learner. Teachers must pay attention to demonstrations of positive affect by introvert learners and not just praise extrovert behavior (ARNOLD; BROWN, 1999).

2.4.3 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is related to how you feel about yourself. According to Smith and Mackie (2007), "self-esteem is the positive or negative evaluations of the self, as in how we feel about it." Extensive research shows that the cognitive features of learning are developed in an environment in which self-esteem is promoted (WALTZ; BLEUER, 1992). Rubio (2007, p. 7) also explains that with low self-esteem "students may avoid taking the necessary risks to acquire

communicative competence in the target language; they may feel deeply insecure and even drop out of the class.”

Therefore, we can conclude that self-esteem has an immediate impact on students’ learning process. For this reason, Canfield and Wells (1994, p. 6) recommend that teachers should “make each learning step small enough so that the student is asked to only risk one chip at a time.”

2.4.4 Motivation

According to Hilgard, Atkinson and Atkinson (1979, p. 281) motivation is a collection of factors which “energize behavior and give it direction”. These factors entail the reasons why a student is learning a second language. Dornyei (2010, p. 75) points out that “The learner’s enthusiasm, commitment, and persistence are key determinants of success or failure.” Therefore, motivation is a paramount affective factor in the students learning process.

Many authors, like Krashen (1985), classify motivation as intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is the learner’s own desire or willingness to learn. They feel curious about the language and it brings them personal satisfaction. Extrinsic motivation comes from the outside and it depends on necessity, external reward or punishment. Although both kinds of motivation are beneficial, research has shown that the intrinsic one influences the learning process the most. In “the autonomy of self-reward”, Bruner (1962) states that without rewards or punishments children are able to think and learn more successfully.

Moreover, intimately connected to intrinsic motivation is the concept of “flow” which was developed by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990). Flow, also known colloquially as being “in the zone”, is the mental state of operation in which a person is completely absorbed in what she is doing. Goleman (1995, p. 90) stresses the importance of this state for successful learning: “Flow represents perhaps the ultimate in harnessing the emotions in the service of performance and learning. In flow the emotions are not just contained and channeled, but positive, energized and aligned with the task at hand.” Thus, according to him, flow feels so good that it is intrinsically rewarding. Activities likely to lead learners to the flow channel must be neither so easy nor so difficult. They must have clear objectives and give immediate feedback. Learners’ feel a sense of control over their own actions and there is no worry for themselves.

3. Methodology

This research was conducted under the participatory paradigm (GUBA; LINCOLN, 2010) as it focused on understanding my own students' perspectives on second language learning through *Exploratory Practice* (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009). In order to collect data, we worked with a few classroom activities as Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs).

3.1 Exploratory practice in language teaching and learning

Conventional ideas about research are product-oriented and stress the need for improvement. However, within the context of language education, this approach may create many problems since it does not consider all variables and highly complex social situations presented in classrooms. Moreover, combining the expectations of teaching and researching practices can be a stressful and time-consuming enterprise making teachers feel overwhelmed and burnt-out. As a reaction to this, Allwright (2003) promoted the idea of practitioners themselves - teachers and learners - grabbing control of the research agenda. Therefore, in classroom research "the learning must be central: not either/or, but both pedagogy and research taking place in the classroom" (HANKS, 2017).

In an attempt to combine research with pedagogy, Exploratory Practice (EP) offers a chance to go beyond other forms of practitioner research by giving priority to understanding over solutions, and by emphasizing the importance of teachers and learners in the teaching/learning process.

Exploratory Practice is a form of practitioner research in which learners as well as teachers are encouraged to investigate their own learning/teaching practices, while concurrently practising the target language. It offers a way of avoiding 'burnout' by integrating teaching, learning, and research (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009).

EP gives teachers an opportunity to see students in a holistic way as it establishes learners and teachers as co-researchers. They work together in order to develop "understandings [that] are collective as well as individual" (ALLWRIGHT, 2005a, p. 360) of their teaching/learning enterprise by using normal pedagogic procedures as investigative tools. Therefore, the practitioners do not need to engage in any extra work in order to conduct classroom research.

For this reason, we can conclude that EP is a sustainable kind of research which focus not only on understanding but also on 'quality of life'. In order to inform and support EP activities, Allwright and Hanks (2009, p.149-154) have developed collaboratively with the members of the Rio Exploratory Practice Group a set of principles for fully inclusive practitioner research:

Principle 1: 'Quality of life' for language teachers and learners is the most appropriate central concern for practitioner research in our field.

Principle 2: Working primarily to understand the 'quality of life', as it is experienced by language learners and teachers, is more important than, and logically prior to, seeking in any way to improve it.

Principle 3: Everybody needs to be involved in the work for understanding.

Principle 4: The work needs to serve to bring people together.

Principle 5: The work needs to be conducted in a spirit of mutual development.

Principle 6: Working for understanding is necessarily a continuous enterprise.

Principle 7: Integrating the work for understanding fully into existing curricular practices is a way of minimizing the burden and maximizing sustainability.

These principles emphasize the importance of having all those involved in the teaching/learning process as practitioners. Exploratory Practice "is a way to be more human with your students as it removes some of the barriers and hierarchies." (POOLE, JESS, 2015, p. 4, as cited in HANKS, 2017).

In the next section, I will explain the PEPAs used in order to collect data for the analysis. A PEPA is a potentially exploitable pedagogic activity, which means it is a normal learning activity used as a way of investigating our puzzles (HANKS, 2017). In this research, I used poster-making as it creates opportunities for active discussion and participation, despite the learner's level, and it facilitates understanding and team work as well (AKISTER; BANNON; MULLENDER-LOCK, 2000).

3.2 Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities - PEPAs

First, in order to get to know what my students understand by the word language, I asked them the question: “What is a language?” and we discussed it together as a group. Then, we brainstormed the languages that we know.

After that, we made a poster with the question: “What is learning a language?” and students shared their views on the matter as they pasted them on the poster. It was really difficult for most of them to answer this question. Next, students explained their reasons for learning English as a second language by completing the sentence: I’m learning English because_____. It was interesting to see that most of them had never thought about why they are learning English.

Finally, we stopped to think about how we feel in the English classroom and why we feel this way. It was really interesting to see my students trying to help each other think and understand their feelings towards the English classroom. After discussing it, they were invited to complete the sentence: “I feel _____ in the English classroom because _____.”; and then illustrate their answers. The combination of written text and drawing seems relevant considering my students age and level of English

Two students were absent during the week these activities were conducted. Therefore, only thirteen students participated. It is important to stress that they were free to use both languages Portuguese and English, and their texts had no spelling corrections, as I wanted them to focus on expressing and understanding their thoughts and feelings and not on accurate language. It is also important to mention that I did not interfere with their answers in any way, having only shared my own views after listening to them.

In order to preserve my students’ identities, their names were changed and their productions were organized in a random sequence.

4 Analysis and reflections

According to Allwright and Miller (2001b), “we don’t notice everything equally. We notice different things in different ways, at different times.” Therefore, the analysis I make on this research is related to the experiences I have had as a teacher, and as someone who is developing as a practitioner researcher. The way I understand my students is directly connected to what I am able to notice.

The analysis and interpretation of data depend on the background knowledge and experience of the person conducting the research. Therefore, there may be other possibilities of interpretation depending on the researcher making the analysis.

In the first PEPA, to see what my students understand as language, we brainstormed possible definitions to explain what language is. I wrote their views on the board and after some discussion, they all agreed with four features to explain the word language.

- Language é o que os outros países falam.¹
- Languages são as línguas que a gente fala.²
- Language é a forma em que nos comunicamos com as outras pessoas. Pode ser por meio de gestos ou palavras.³
- Existem diferentes languages.⁴

Just as Halliday (1978), my students refer to language as a means of communication. They also seem to know that a language may change from one country to another. However, it appears that most of them think of communication as something purely oral, since none of them mentioned written modes and only one student suggested that communication can be done through gestures.

As part of the next PEPA, students shared their views about what it means to learn a language. They wrote down their answers and pasted them on a poster under the question: What is learning a language?

Student 1

“São outras liguas.” (Yuri – 2nd grade in 2018)

¹ Language is what other countries speak. ² Languages are the languages that we speak. ³ Language is the way we communicate with other people. It can be through gestures or words. ⁴ There are different languages.

Yuri probably wrote the word “lígua” in an attempt to write the word “língua”, that is, language. It seems to me that he did not understand the question, or he did not know how to express himself well since his answer is not related to learning at all and it only focused on language. It is possible that he meant that learning a language means to learn other languages different from his own native one.

Student 2

“Aprender language é aprender outra língua.” (Ana – 2nd grade in 2018)

Ana chose to use both English and Portuguese languages when writing her answer. This shows that she tried to use the English language, but she probably does not feel confident enough with it to express all her thoughts and feelings. It seems that she believes learning a language is to learn other languages besides her native one.

Student 3

“É a preder a ligua e em tender.” (Daniel – 2nd grade in 2018)

As we can see, Daniel struggles with writing in Portuguese. However, it is still possible to understand the message behind the misspelled answer. When he says that learning a language means to learn it and understand it, it gives the impression that he believes learning and understanding goes hand in hand.

Student 4

“É você aprender a falar para você se comunicar.” (Thiago – 2nd grade in 2018)

Thiago related learning a language to the speaking skill. He does not seem to take into consideration the other three abilities – reading, writing and listening – as part of the learning process. He also connected speaking to being able to communicate, ignoring other ways of communication.

Student 5

“É você aprender as línguas ou falar.” (Bruno – 2nd grade in 2018)

Bruno's point of view is not very clear. He says that learning a language is to learn the languages. It seems that he has specific languages in mind as he uses the expression "as línguas", but it is not possible to know which languages he means. He also stated that learning a language means speaking, setting the focus of the learning process on this ability.

Student 6

"Aprender uma linguagem é português, Matemática, Inglês e outras coisas."
(Jade – 2nd grade in 2018)

We can see that Jade has problems with writing in Portuguese. She wrote the words "liguagem" and "potuguê" probably in an attempt to write the words "linguagem" and "Português". It is not possible to say what she meant by "outras coisas" and it seems that she does not know how to express herself well since it is not clear what learning a language is in her opinion.

Student 7

"A lingua da China é deferente da lingua portuguesa." (Alice – 2nd grade in 2018)

We can understand, from the context, that Adriana wrote the word "deferente" meaning "diferente". We can see that she knows there are languages different from Portuguese, which is her native one, and that in China they have their own. However, she did not say what learning a language is in her opinion.

Student 8

"É aprender a falar, a pensar, a escrever, a ler." (Guilherme – 2nd grade in 2018)

It is interesting to see what learning a language means to Guilherme. While all the other students relate it only to speaking, it appears that he sees it as something far more complex. He insinuated that learning a language entails learning how to speak, write, read and think in the target language.

Student 9

"Language é falar iguais vários países." (Nelson – 2nd grade in 2018)

Nelson used both Portuguese and English languages. This shows that he tried to use English, but he probably does not feel confident enough with it to express himself well. We can see that Nelson is aware that different countries

may speak different languages. He related learning a language to speaking like other countries. As countries do not speak we can conclude that he used the word “países” to refer to people from other countries.

Student 10

“Aprender linguas é legal e bom que você pode falar com as outras pessoas.” (Violeta – 2nd grade in 2018)

Student 11

“Aprender linguas é legal e bom que você pode falar com as outras pessoas.” (Larissa – 2nd grade in 2018)

As we can see, Violeta and Larissa wrote exactly the same answer. It is not possible to say who wrote it originally and who copied it. However, we can suppose they both agree with this view of what learning a language is. They used the word “legal” which shows that they like learning languages and they also related learning to speaking.

Student 12

“E você vai aprender a falar macaco.” (Nathan – 2nd grade in 2018)

It is a bit difficult to understand what Nathan means with his answer. It is possible that he used the word “macaco” to exemplify a word a person may learn in another language.

Student 13

“É aprender liguas de outros lugares e quando viajar você falar com eles.” (Marcos – 2nd grade in 2018)

It is clear that Marcos knows that different places may have different languages. As he related learning a language to travelling, we can conclude that he probably sees it as a reason for learning a language. He also connected language to speaking.

As we have already seen in chapter 2.4.4, motivation is a key affective factor for the language learning process success or failure (DORNYEI, 2010). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are important, but the intrinsic one is the most influential. Therefore, the next PEPA was used to find out why my students are learning English as a second language. As they take part in the bilingual

program, they go to school every day earlier than necessary to have one hour of English class. They wrote their motivations on pieces of paper and pasted them on a poster. It was interesting to notice that most of them had never thought about it and as a consequence it was a bit difficult for them to answer this question. We can see in the chart below the learners' reasons for learning English as a second language.

Students	I'm learning English because
Yuri	"para quando eu for pra disney eu saber falar inglês."
Ana	"para aprender uma nova língua."
Daniel	"pra quando ir pra outro pais conseguir falar."
Thiago	"para quando eu ir para a Disney eu saber falar em inglês."
Bruno	"pra ir a Disney."
Jade	"porque eu gosto de aprender coisas novas."
Alice	"pra ir pra Disney."
Guilherme	"para aprender uma nova língua e para ir para a Disney."
Nelson	"para ir para Nova York."
Violeta	"eu amo. Porque para quando eu for adulta eu saber falar com outras pessoas."
Larissa	"eu amo. Porque para quando eu for adulta eu saber falar com outras pessoas."
Nathan	"porque eu presto atenção na aula de Inglês."
Marcos	"para ir a Disney."

By looking at this chart, we can see that eight students out of thirteen stated that their reason for learning English as a second language is related to traveling. Six students mentioned going to Disney and one student mentioned going to New York as their primary motivation for learning the language. One student also reported going to another country as his main purpose, but he was not specific about it, which might suggest that he intends to go to more than one English speaking country. These students are extrinsically motivated by a possible trip, which is probably a reward offered by their parents in an attempt to persuade or encourage them to learn English.

Two students affirmed they are learning English just because they want to, showing no evidence of a specific objective. One of them even used the verb "gosto" to express her feelings towards learning new things, in this specific case, a new language. It seems that these students have an inner desire – intrinsic

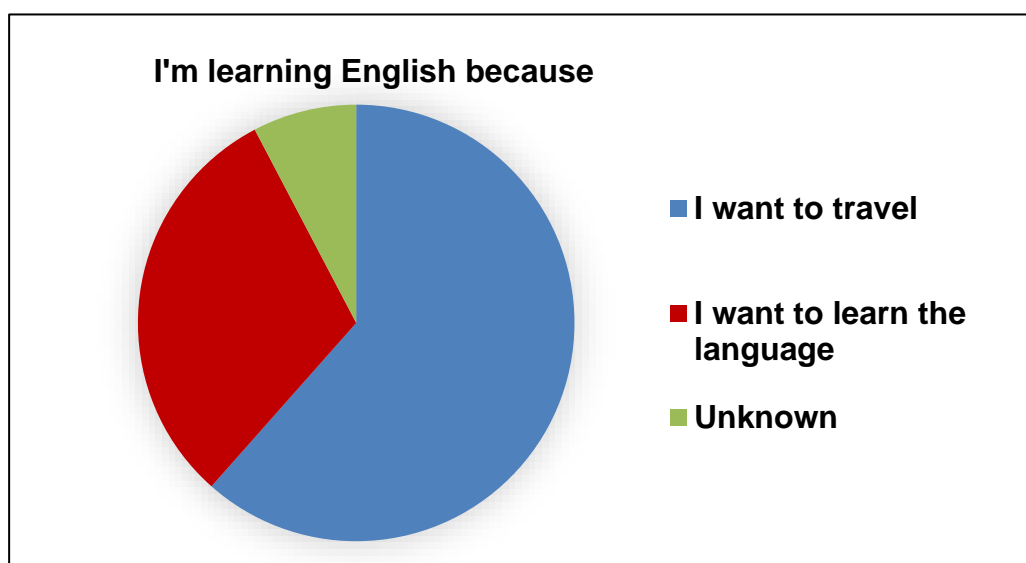
motivation – for learning the language, and it probably brings them personal satisfaction.

Once more the students Violeta and Larissa wrote exactly the same answer. We cannot say who originally wrote it and who copied it, but we can assume that they both agree with this statement. They started by saying how they feel about learning English. They used the word “amo” which indicates strong positive affect towards the language. Then, they related learning English to being an adult. This indicates they do not see any immediate purpose for learning it, but only in a far future. The students’ motivation seems to be intrinsic as they expressed their wish to learn in order to communicate with other people.

Nathan wrote that he is learning English because he pays attention in the class. His answer does not indicate any specific aim for it. It seems that he regards the language learning as a simple result of paying attention in the class. It is not possible to say if his motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic.

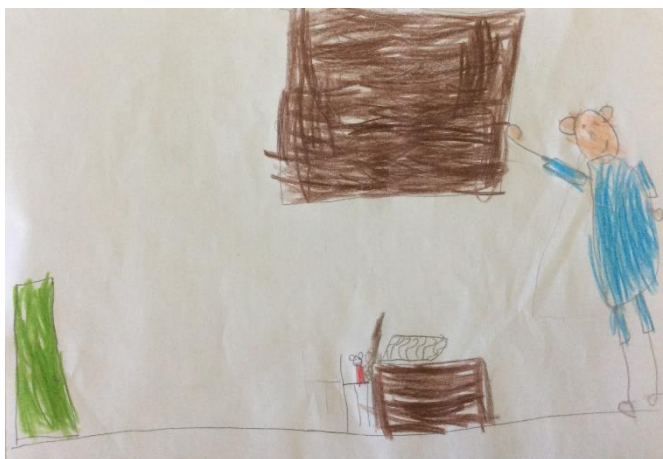
Something which called my attention when reading my students’ answers was that five out of thirteen students connected the word “falar” to learning English. It seems they prefer speaking as a means of communication, and they also seem not to care much about the other abilities. They suggest learning a language is related to speaking.

This graph below may help visualize my students’ answers. The image represents their motivation for learning English as a second language at that specific time.



Establishing a positive affective atmosphere in the classroom is paramount for sustaining motivation and improving academic performance. If learners feel stressed or anxious in the classroom, they will avoid participating of the activities and as a result they will miss out the benefits of meaningful interaction. In classes with a positive affective atmosphere, learners feel included, appreciated and respected as individuals. As a consequence, they tend to be more emotionally open to reaching their full learning potential. The next and last PEPA was used to understand how my students feel in our English classroom and why they feel this way. They wrote their feelings and thoughts on pieces of paper, and then, illustrated their answers. Some of them mixed Portuguese and English languages to express themselves.

Student 1

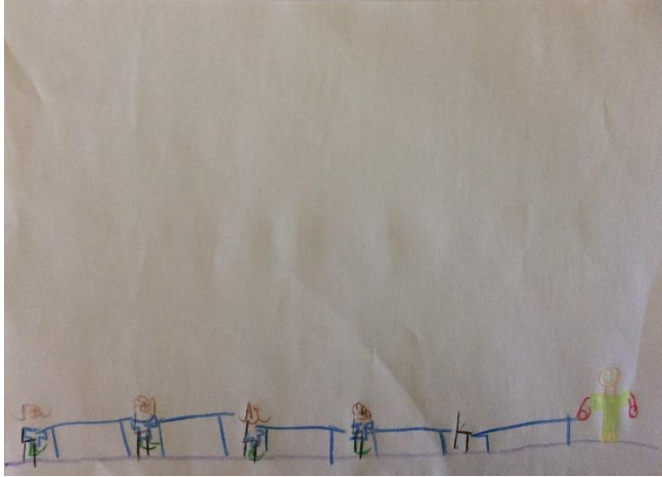


“I feel OK in the English classroom because o dever é fácil.” (Yuri – 2nd grade in 2018)

Yuri wrote that he feels OK which probably indicates he feels good but not very good in the English classroom. In his opinion, the tasks are easy and that is why he feels OK. Therefore, he related his performance in the class to how he feels. This concern for good performance usually makes students feel worry wasting their energy which should be used for memory and processing. His illustration shows me, the teacher, much bigger than him, the student, which might express how he sees the teacher-student relationship. He did not draw other students, but only himself sitting and writing on a paper. He did not illustrate much furniture, but he chose to draw the door which might represent an unrevealed wish to leave the classroom. It seems to me that he feels a bit

anxious and pressured, since he drew himself sitting and writing many lines on a paper.

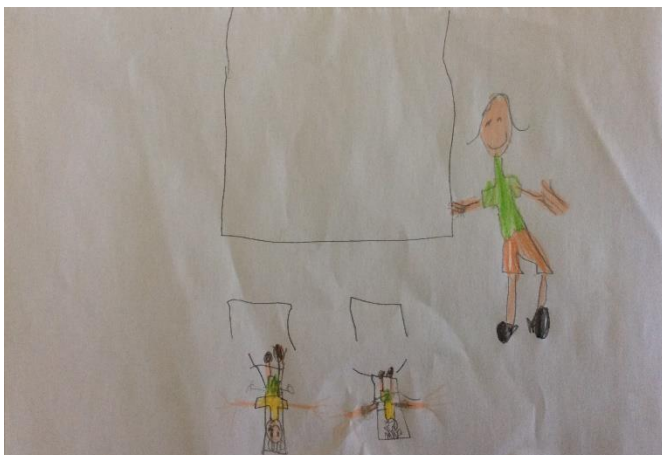
Student 2



"I feel OK in the English classroom because é legal aprender novas línguas."
(Ana – 2nd grade in 2018)

Ana also wrote OK to express herself which suggests moderate satisfaction towards the English classroom. According to her, it is cool to learn new languages and that is the reason for her to feel this way. Therefore, her feelings are related to an inner desire for learning, which is the most beneficial kind of motivation. Her illustration shows smiling students sitting in a row with one empty desk facing the teacher in the front. This might indicate she sees the classroom as teacher-centered and she likes that. I cannot see any evidence of negative feelings in her illustration.

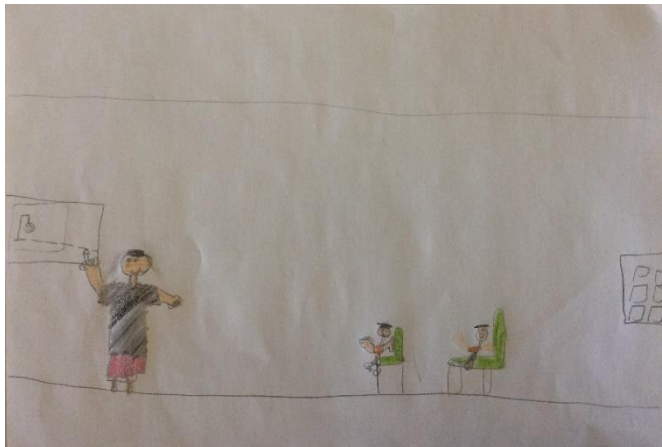
Student 3



“I feel OK in the English classroom because eu acho que é tranquilo.” (Daniel – 2nd grade in 2018)

Daniel wrote OK to describe how he feels too, which suggests moderate satisfaction towards the English classroom. He used the word “tranquilo” to explain why he feels Ok. However, this word may have different meanings. It might be used to say something is peaceful or to say something is easy. Therefore, it is not possible to know exactly the reason behind his feelings towards the English classroom. His illustration shows two students and a teacher in the classroom. The students seem to be lying on chairs, and these are on the floor. Everybody is happy, and the teacher seems to be dancing. From his drawing, it seems that he likes to be in the classroom, which contributes to a good performance.

Student 4



“I feel excited in the English classroom because we play sometimes.” (Thiago – 2nd grade in 2018)

Thiago used the word excited to express how he feels, which is a very positive feeling. He wrote that sometimes they play and that is why he feels excited. Therefore, his feelings are related to having fun in the classroom. His illustration shows a teacher and two students playing the game Hangman on the board. This game might be one of his favorite activities. As he has very positive feelings towards the English classroom, he may have high self-esteem which would contribute for high level of participation in the activities.

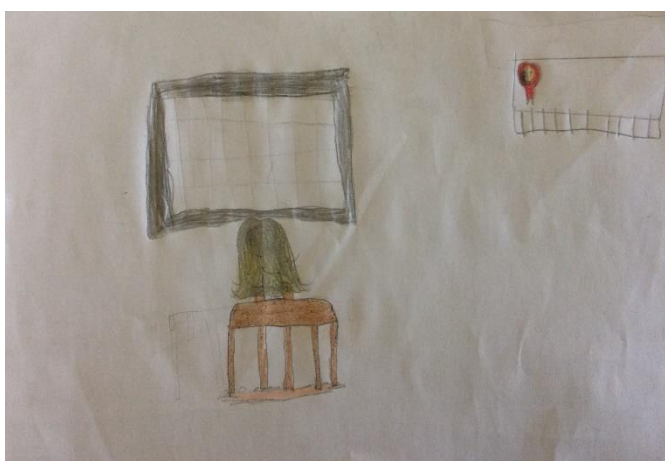
Student 5



"I feel happy in the English classroom because eu gosto de inglês." (Bruno – 2nd grade in 2018)

Bruno wrote the word happy to describe how he feels. He stated that he likes English and explained this is the reason for his positive feelings towards the English classroom. His feelings are related to a probably positive past experience with the language, which contributes to a good language development. His illustration shows a board with some written lines and himself as the only student. There is not a teacher and he looks very happy.

Student 6



"I feel happy in the English classroom because a aula de Inglês é legal." (Jade – 2nd grade in 2018)

Jade wrote the word happy to express how she feels. In her opinion, the English classes are cool and that is why she feels happy in the English classroom. She did not reveal why she thinks the classes are cool. However, it is possible that she relates her feelings to having fun in the classroom. Although she says she feels happy, her illustration does not show that. She drew herself alone in the classroom, sitting on a desk, and facing the board. We can see her only from behind, so it is not possible to see her face and how she actually feels. Her illustration gives an idea of loneliness and sadness. She may have low self-esteem and feel insecure.

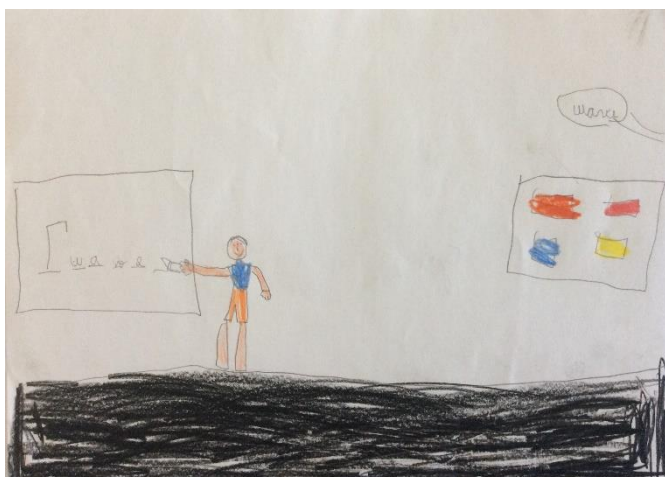
Student 7



“I feel happy in the English classroom because a minha professora bota videos.”
(Alice – 2nd grade in 2018)

Alice explained she feels happy because her teacher puts videos. This suggests that she accounts me, the teacher, responsible for her positive feelings towards the English classroom. Her illustration shows two students sitting on desks with lots of materials on them, facing the board in which a video is playing. She also wrote the word school with an exclamation mark with a heart, which indicates her affection for the school and the English classroom. This positive affect might ease the language learning process.

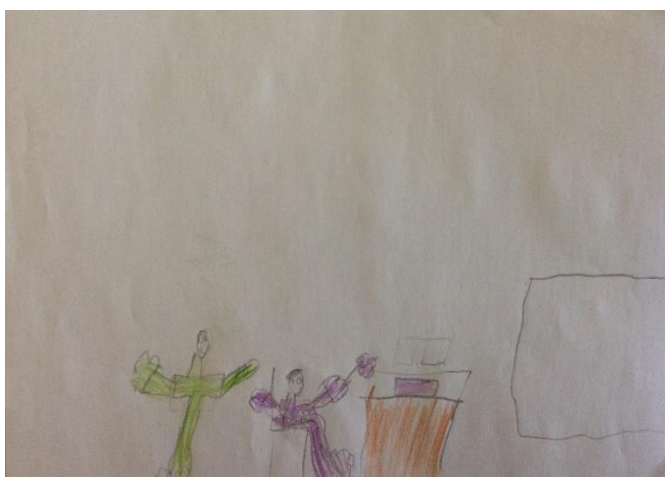
Student 8



“I feel excited in the English classroom because we play sometimes.” (Guilherme – 2nd grade in 2018)

Guilherme used the word *excited*, which is a very positive feeling, to describe how he feels in the English classroom. He justified this feeling by saying it is because they sometimes play. Therefore, he relates his feelings to having fun in the classroom. His illustration shows him happy playing the game Hangman on the board, which suggests it is one of his favorite activities. There are no other students, but we can see a speech bubble on the right with the word *wave*. It probably indicates that someone, who is not in the illustration, said this word to complete the game Hangman on the board. It might also indicate that he likes taking control of the activities and he is probably an active participant of the classes which would help him take the necessary risks to acquire communicative competence in the English language.

Student 9



“I feel OK in the English classroom because eu sou maisomenos em escrever.”
(Nelson – 2nd grade in 2018)

Nelson wrote he feels OK which indicates moderate satisfaction towards the English classroom. He affirmed that his writing performance is average and that is why he feels OK. He related his feelings to his performance in the writing skill, not mentioning the other ones. This might suggest he feels insecure about it, and he probably feels better at the other skills. This concern for good performance usually make students feel worry wasting their energy which should be used for memory and processing. His illustration shows him sitting on a desk and a person, which is probably the teacher, standing up. Both of them look happy which is a sign of a good learning atmosphere.

Student 10



“I feel worried in the English classroom because eu tenho ideias novas.” (Violeta – 2nd grade in 2018)

Violeta wrote she feels worried in the English classroom, and the reason for that is a bit odd. She said it is because she has new ideas, which might suggest that she feels a bit afraid of these new ideas, but she did not reveal what these new ideas are. Her illustration shows her sitting on a desk and a person, probably the teacher, standing up next to the board. Both of them look happy, and she has a thought bubble next to her, but it is not possible to see clearly what her thoughts are. It is worth mentioning that Violeta is one of the most participative students in class, and she has also the highest grades. Although she feels worried, she still feels comfortable enough to participate and learn effectively.

Student 11



"I feel worried in the English classroom because eu fico preocupada da alea."
(Larissa – 2nd grade in 2018)

In all the previous PEPAs, Larissa copied her answers from Violeta, and this seems to be an attempt to copy again. However, something went wrong and her explanation for why she feels worried in the English classroom is not possible to understand. Her illustration shows her sitting on a desk and a person, probably the teacher, writing on the board. The teacher is much bigger than the student which might indicate how she sees the teacher-student relationship. Although, she says she feels worried, she seems happy in the drawing which may ease the learning process.

Student 12



"I feel nervous in the English classroom because meus amigos estão fazendo barulhos que da nervoso." (Nathan – 2nd grade in 2018)

Nathan wrote he feels nervous in the English classroom and accounted his classmates responsible for that because they are making noises. His illustration is not very clear to see, but it seems that there are some students doing different things, such as speaking, laughing, dancing. He wrote the letters Shhs next to each student possibly to exemplify the noise they are making. From his drawing, it seems to me that he feels anxious, which is the most common obstacle for students to overcome in the learning process.

Student 13



"I feel OK in the English classroom because é legal aprender outras linguas."
(Marcos – 2nd grade in 2018)

Marcos said he feels OK which indicates moderate satisfaction towards the English classroom. In his opinion, it is cool to learn other languages and that is why he feels OK. Therefore, his feelings are related to an inner desire to learn, which is the most beneficial kind of motivation. His illustration shows him sitting on a desk smiling. There are no other students and it is not possible to understand what he drew on the board. I cannot see any evidence of negative feelings in her illustration, which might be a sign of positive affective atmosphere.

Reflecting on these PEPAs, I realized that all these activities brought us together as we expressed our thoughts and feelings, and we stopped to listen to each other. They helped enhance the mutual respect and support not only between my students and me, but also between them. They encouraged these young learners to blossom, both as people and as language learners.

5 Conclusion

This paper aimed at understanding young learners' perspectives on second language learning and how they feel about learning English as a second language. As a considerate person and teacher, I wanted to know more about what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom, and the effect of the affective factors on our lives as learners and educators.

This research was conducted under the participatory paradigm as it focused on understanding my own students through Exploratory Practice. The data was collected from a few potential exploitable pedagogic activities conducted in the class. The students were very participative and seemed to enjoy taking part in this journey.

Stevick (1980), Arnold and Brown (1999), Dewaele (2005) and others have stated the importance of affect in the language learning process. The PEPAs conducted with my students gave us the opportunity to reflect about their reasons for learning English as a second language and to discuss their feelings related not only to the English language but also to the classroom.

Most of my students seem to consider learning a language as learning to communicate orally, as they used the word "falar" to explain what learning a language is. This might indicate that their priority is on the speaking skill and that they possibly do not give much importance to the other skills. Moreover, they all seem to consider learning a language as to learning a foreign one, forgetting, at that specific moment, about their own native language, which they learn it a little more every day.

Motivation is an essential affective factor in the language learning process as it is determinant for one's success or failure. From my thirteen students, eight are extrinsically motivated, which means that their motivation comes from an external reward, whereas four are intrinsically motivated, which means that they have a genuine desire to learn and for that reason they benefit the most.

Establishing a safe and positive affective atmosphere in the classroom is crucial for the learners to feel comfortable enough to participate and take the necessary risks in order to learn a second language. Most of my students expressed positive to moderate feelings towards the English classroom, which is a great indication that they like to be there and to participate of it. As a result, they are more emotionally open to accomplishing their full learning potential.

As Theodore Roosevelt said, "People don't care how much we know until they know how much we care." Therefore, the importance we give to affect in our classes establishes how meaningful our teaching and our students' learning can be. When planning a lesson, teachers should consider not only activities for the students to achieve linguistic goals but also activities to attain emotional goals, such as sense of achievement, self-esteem and autonomy.

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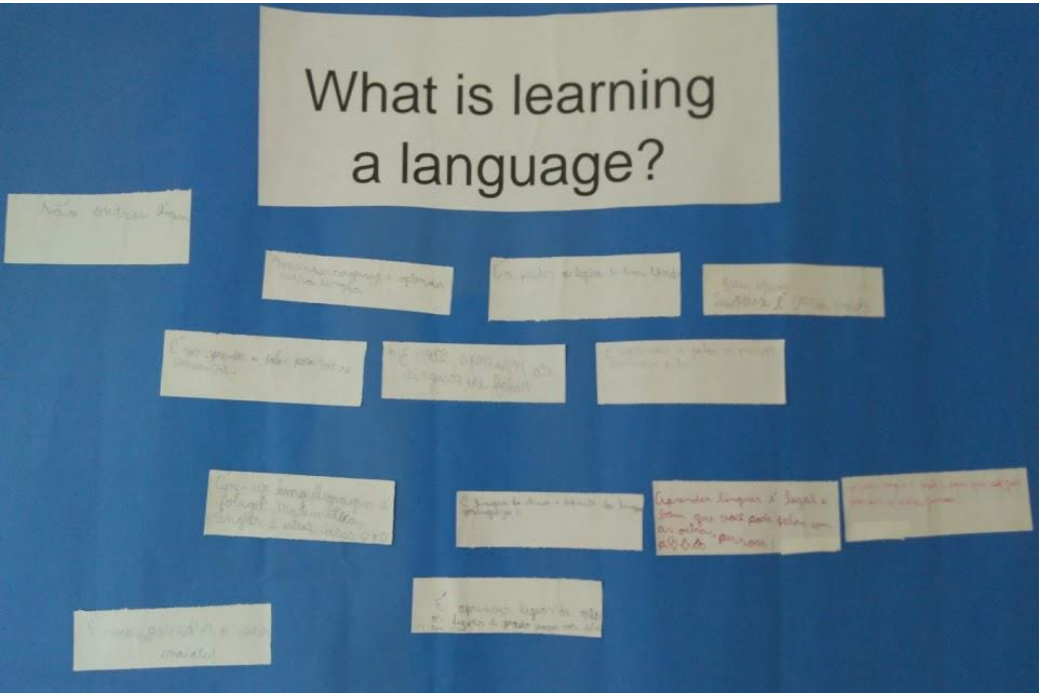
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7 Appendices

Poster 1



Poster 2

