


MATERIALizing a meaningful and critical English language teaching with children: the extension project LICOMzinho and its teaching material proposal /

MATERIALizando um ensino significativo e crítico de língua inglesa com crianças: o projeto de extensão LICOMzinho e sua proposta de material didático

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to present the proposal for teaching material developed within the extension project “Oficina On-line de Língua Inglesa para Crianças – LICOMzinho”, which offers free online English classes to children aged 8 to 11 from all over Brazil. These classes are taught by undergraduate students of the English Language and English-Language Literatures program at the Languages and Literatures Institute (ILE) of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). This extension initiative is an offshoot of an online Spanish teaching extension project for children that has been developed at UERJ since 2021. The name “LICOMzinho” is a tribute to the LICOM-PLIC Project (Languages for the Community), based at ILE, which seeks to promote linguistic education for students aged 18 to 60 through courses in various languages. Based on a perspective of meaningful (Costa, 2022) and critical (Pennycook, 2004, 2021; Tilio, 2017) English language teaching with children, this study describes and analyzes the didactic sequence “James, The Micro Mayor” used in the classes from June 17th to July 12th, 2024. The teaching material proposed here is grounded in the triad of Contextualization, Conceptualization, and Transformation. Its goal is to promote situated English teaching that recognizes children as socio-historically engaged subjects in social practices, which, due to their complexity and diversity, need to be problematized. In this sense, this extension project encompasses not only the teaching of an additional language but also the development of critical linguistic education from childhood.

KEYWORDS: Extension project; English language teaching with children, meaningful and critical teaching; teaching material.

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RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar a proposta de material didático elaborado no projeto de extensão “Oficina On-line de Língua Inglesa para Crianças – LICOMzinho”, que oferta aulas on-line e gratuitas de inglês a crianças de 8 a 11 anos de todo o Brasil, ministradas por alunos/as do curso de graduação em Letras Inglês-Literaturas de Língua Inglesa do Instituto de Letras (ILE) da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). Esta ação extensionista é um desdobramento de um projeto de extensão de ensino on-line de espanhol para crianças que tem sido desenvolvido desde 2021 na UERJ. O nome “LICOMzinho” é uma homenagem ao Projeto LICOM-PLIC (Línguas para a Comunidade), alocado no ILE, que busca promover a educação linguística de alunos/as de 18 a 60 anos com cursos de diversos idiomas. A partir de uma visão de ensino significativo (Autora, 2022) e crítico (Pennycook, 2004, 2021; Tilio, 2017) de língua inglesa com crianças, este estudo descreve e analisa a sequência didática “James, The Micro Mayor” utilizada nas oficinas de 17 de junho a 12 de julho de 2024. A proposta de material didático aqui apresentada fundamenta-se na triade Contextualização, Conceitualização e Transformação, a fim de promover um ensino de inglês situado que entende as crianças enquanto sujeitos sócio-historicamente engajados em práticas sociais que, dada a sua complexidade e diversidade, precisam ser problematizadas. Neste sentido, o referido projeto de extensão abarca não apenas o ensino de uma língua adicional, mas, também, o desenvolvimento de uma educação linguística crítica desde a infância.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Projeto de extensão; ensino de inglês com crianças; ensino significativo e crítico; material didático.

1 Introduction

In highlighting the word “material” in “MATERIALizing,” in the title of this article, I indicate that the present work focuses on teaching materials. In addition to this, I draw attention to the fact that the content emerging from this proposal becomes something tangible, which materializes. This is the aim of this article: to translate a concept of English language teaching to children in the form of teaching material.

To fulfill this purpose, I believe it is relevant to explain that I understand the term teaching materials in a broader sense. I am therefore talking about all kinds of materials used for educational purposes. Thus, music, games, exercise sheets, slides, videos, podcasts, cartoons, magazine and newspaper articles, printed and/or online etc., can be used as teaching materials. I understand that such examples include materials produced for pedagogical purposes and those materials that circulate in our daily lives, which are not meant to be used exclusively in the classroom. In addition to these materials is the coursebook, a hypergenre which may encompass several other genres, such as those just mentioned (Tilio, 2016).

Just as important as understanding what teaching materials are is being aware that everything in them has a reason to be. Choosing texts, images, and activities that make up their preparation, for example, or choosing already existing materials, as well as those which will be made didactic is always linked to perspectives of teaching and of learning, of the role of the teacher

and the student. Also, with regard to language teaching, such choices are also connected with conceptions of language.

In this scenario, this article addresses the meaningful and critical language teaching that informs the process of material preparation in an extension project aimed at teaching English to children and at providing teacher education to undergraduates of the course of Letters English-Literatures at the Institute of Letters (ILE) of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ).

With this context in mind, I begin by presenting the extension project Online English Language Workshop for Children: LICOMzinho. Next, I explain the meaningful and critical viewpoint that underlies the teaching materials produced at the project. Afterwards, I systematize the theoretical-methodological assumptions employed in producing the materials. Next, I provide insights into teaching materials. Eventually, I materialize the proposal developed over the course of this work by describing and interpreting a didactic sequence applied in the workshops from June to July 2024. This proposal lives up to the title of this article.

2 Getting to know LICOMzinho

LICOMzinho originated from the extension project Spanish Workshop for Children, initiated in 2015, supervised by Dr. Rodrigo da Silva Campos, Adjunct Professor of Spanish at the Department of Neo-Latin Letters (LNEO) at ILE, UERJ. From 2015 to 2019, the Spanish Workshop took place in person at the Fernando Rodrigues da Silveira Application Institute (Laboratory School) (CAP-UERJ). With the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, and the consequent cancellation of classes decreed by the Government of the State of Rio de Janeiro, the project was interrupted, as it was not possible to have access to CAP-UERJ students for any purposes, even online.

In 2021, the project was resumed online and was renamed Online Spanish Workshop for Children, teaching Spanish online to children aging from 8 to 11 and from all over Brazil. In 2023, the project expanded its scope and became the Online Workshop on Additional Languages for Children - LICOMzinho¹, which offers, in addition to teaching Spanish, the teaching of English, French, German, Italian, Modern Greek². The name “LICOMzinho” is a tribute to the project LICOM-

¹ More information about the project can be found on our social network, on the Instagram page @licomzinho.uerj.

² The project includes Dr. Rodrigo Campos (general coordinator, from 2023 to 2024, and Spanish language supervisor), Dr. Talita Barreto (Spanish language team member), Dr. Poliana Coeli (German language supervisor), Dr. Pedro Armando (French language supervisor), Dr. Dulcileide Braga (modern Greek supervisor), Dr. Fernanda de

PLIC (Languages for the Community), located in the ILE, which, in turn, seeks to promote language education in several languages for students aged 18 to 60.

Besides expanding language education for children from 8 to 11 years old from all over the country through additional online language classes, the project aims to provide the ILE licentiate students (student teachers) with the opportunity to plan and prepare teaching materials, and provide workshops on additional language for children in a virtual environment. The undergraduates' participation characterizes the project as an opportunity for the student teachers to receive pedagogical education in the context of teaching additional languages for children.

Regarding project structure, each additional language has a team consisting of a supervisor and their undergraduate students (student teachers), who are either scholarship students or volunteers. As for the workshops, they are held on Google Meet, from Monday to Thursday, from 14:00 to 18:00. Each additional language has at least two student teachers, who may be scholarship students and/or volunteers. Each one is responsible for teaching two classes. The English language team, under my supervision, consists of four scholarship students, of which three are responsible for teaching the workshops and one is in charge of preparing teaching materials, who, in turn, works alongside a volunteer student. In this regard, it should be noted that the project does not adopt coursebooks. All materials used are produced by the pedagogical teams. Such materials include, for instance, slides produced on the Canva platform, videos available on YouTube, and interactive games.

Each class consists of 17 children from 8 to 11 years old, based on various locations throughout the country, and each group attends one-hour workshops held twice a week every other day (Mondays and Wednesdays or Tuesdays and Thursdays). Fridays are reserved for supervision meetings for the additional language teams and for general educational meetings with all project members. The latter events take place once a month. At these meetings, the coordinators, as well as guest teachers/researchers give lectures on subjects concerning teaching and learning additional languages for and with children, such as conceptions about childhood(s), teaching materials development and the use of technologies for teaching languages. The student teachers also take part in the educational meetings, by exchanging experiences and presenting the activities conducted during the workshops.

Lima (modern Greek team member), Dr. Julia Scamparini (Italian language supervisor) and Dr. Marcello Oliveira (English language team member), all professors at UERJ. In 2025, in addition to being responsible for the English language workshops, I became general project coordinator.

Unlike language courses, LICOMzinho online workshops are not organized into proficiency levels such as basic, intermediate, and advanced. The workshops last one year, and after that period new registrations are opened following each academic year, so that other children have the opportunity to participate. Thus, a child who has completed the English language workshops, for example, cannot be enrolled for the same language again; however, they are allowed to enroll for the other languages offered. Registrations take place through an online form, to be filled out by the children's legal guardians during the registration period promoted on the project's Instagram page.

Besides the additional language teams, LICOMzinho has a secretariat consisting of three scholarship students from the Portuguese-Spanish Literature undergraduate course at UERJ. The team is in charge of the project's administrative division and of communicating with the children's legal guardians. The secretariat is also responsible for managing the project's Instagram page.

Once the organization of the project as a whole has come to knowledge, the next sections will be responsible for presenting LICOMzinho's concept of English language education, which, consequently, informs the preparation of the teaching materials used in the workshops.

3 Meaningful and critical English language teaching with children

The proposal for English language teaching materials developed at LICOMzinho is intrinsically linked to the teaching perspective that informs the online workshops. Therefore, before presenting the proposal itself, I focus on the conceptions of language, as well as those of teaching and learning which underpin the work conducted by the scholarship students.

Aiming to contribute to children's linguistic education, the English language LICOMzinho understands that language ability is a fundamental part of the cognitive, social, and critical development of individuals. In this sense, this extension project defends the idea that offering English language education to children, as well as its inclusion in the children's lives, is socially significant.

Thus, learning a FL at the early stages of life, today, does not necessarily and exclusively mean that the learner is being prepared for adult life — as suggested by those in charge of school education. Offering a FL to contemporary children means ensuring that they have a social space, enabling them to co-exist, act and interact in a world as its integrating part as a child (...). It is about stopping looking exclusively at the future or the past, and beginning

to consider the child student in their present existence. It is about appreciating the moment and its singularities. (Colombo and Consolo, 2016, p. 49)³

Linked to a redefinition of childhood in the post-modern society, the English language LICOMzinho understands the child as a child, viewing them as a subject whose development occurs in the course of their interactions with interlocutors, whether they are teachers, members of the family context, or other children. Therefore, teaching English translates into promoting meaningful practices (Costa, 2022), that is, based on topics that are familiar to children, which dialogue with the social practices in which they engage so that, in this way, learning the additional language makes sense to them.

Through meaningful practices (Costa, 2022), LICOMzinho's online workshops promote English language not only *for* children, as a target audience to be catered to, but also *with* children, by including their singularities as socio-historically situated subjects. I am therefore talking about a teaching that considers the social practices in which children participate. For example, at home, at school, at games, at parties, between the children and their families, their friends, their teachers and other adults. Thus, understanding that social interaction is present in all spheres of human activity, it is assumed that it is also part of the teaching and learning processes of English as an additional language. Thus, the online English language workshops subscribe to a sociocultural view of teaching and learning (Vygotsky, 1991; 2010a; 2010b).

According to Vygotsky's theory, social interactions are fundamental to children's cognitive development, in the sense that certain categories of higher mental functions, such as voluntary attention, logical memory, verbal and conceptual thinking, and complex emotions, would not constitute the development process without the constructive role of social interactions.

Fundamental to the construction of social interactions is the constitutive role of language. It is in and through language that interactions between subjects take place. In the social practices in which children engage, there are several oral and written discourse genres (Bakhtin, 1997) constructed in and by language, and which have certain more or less stable characteristics which respond to the socio-historical moment in which the texts are found. Such texts circulate in the meaningful practices (Costa, 2022) in which children participate or may participate.

In order to account for the conditions of each sphere of human activity, discursive genres have three constitutive elements: a) thematic content, that is, the reality in which the utterance

³ FL (Foreign Language).

occurs, which encompasses the meanings linked to how language is used in specific situations and contexts; b) compositional form, which refers to how the genre is organized, to the “type of structuring and conclusion of a whole, a type of relationship between the speaker and the other partners of verbal communication” (Bakhtin, 1997, p. 284); and c) style, which can be defined as the language’s selection of lexical, grammatical, and multimodal resources for constructing the genre. In this sense, discourse genres cannot be understood as a free combination of language forms on the part of individuals. They are, therefore,

social manifestations of language, materialized in verbal and/or non-verbal elements, and intentionally selected and organized with a socio-interactional objective, within a social sphere, in order to allow the interlocutors/interlocutors to construct meanings and their action in that sphere, as a result of activating previous knowledge of sociocultural practices of use. (Tilio, 2019, p. 203)

Given the diversity of spheres of human activity, texts produced in and by language include verbal and/or non-verbal elements that demand the rethinking of more traditional conceptions about reading and writing practices, in which language is solely understood as a synonym for decoding meanings. In this sense, it is necessary to adopt views that encompass, for example, the rapid changes that occur in communication media, which are increasingly multisemiotized, as a result of the transformations of the contemporary world and of the post-modern world (Fridman, 2000; Hall, 2005).

In view of the above, teaching English to and with children requires that we think based on multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, 2015), that is, grounded in two aspects of textual multiplicity: social diversity and multimodality. Social diversity means the variability of meaning conventions in different cultural or social situations, or specific domains (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, 2015). Texts vary greatly depending on aspects such as life experiences, the subject in question, the disciplinary domain, the area of work, specific knowledge, the cultural sector, and gender identities. These variants have become increasingly significant for the ways in which we interact in our daily lives, for the ways in which we participate in the construction of meanings.

With regard to multimodality, it should be recognized that writing was once considered the main form of constructing meaning. Nowadays, however, written modes of meaning can be complemented, for example, by recordings or transmissions of oral, visual, auditory, gestural, and other meanings. Thus, Cope and Kalantzis (2000, 2015) point out the fact that it is indispensable to conceive literacy pedagogy in addition to alphabetical education. Thus, it is urgent that, in

learning environments, traditional reading and writing skills be supplemented with modes of constructing multimodal meanings.

Considering the cultural and semiotic multiplicity that permeates social practices, it is crucial to problematize the discourses with which children engage. Thus, the proposal for teaching English for and with children developed at LICOMzinho understands additional language learning not only as the knowledge of linguistic structures, but also as the appropriation of new perspectives on the world around us, by means of critical literacy practices that are configured as the possibility to problematize crystallized ideological and power relations, emphasizing “representations and analyses regarding differences, such as: racial, sexual, gender and questions about who wins or loses in certain social relations” (Brazil, 2006, p. 116).

It is a simultaneous process of reading text and reading the world. CL refers to the ways of viewing text, whether it is written, visual, oral or hypertext, to question and challenge the attitudes, values, and beliefs that are mobilized in the interpretative process of constructing meanings. (Edmundo, 2013, p. 77)⁴

Within the scope of the English language LICOMzinho, critical literacy is conceived as a political act, a problematizing practice characterized by taking a skeptical look at ideas and notions that, because they are not questioned, have become naturalized (Pennycook, 2004, 2021). Constantly questioning existing discourses is sought in order to understand their causes and multiple consequences. The critical sense to which I refer “also considers issues of access, power, difference, inequality, and resistance (...). More than seeking truths, being critical, from this perspective, implies seeking to understand possible explanations for the situations that arise” (Tilio, 2017, pp. 23 and 24).

By inserting the English language LICOMzinho into a critical perspective (Pennycook, 2004, 2021; Tilio, 2017), I place the online workshops that compose this extension project in a field of work committed to a concept of language as a fundamental part of constructing children as socio-historically situated subjects who, when interacting with other equally situated subjects, have their words and consciousness formed and transformed by the words of others, in a constant enumerative link permeated by different values and understandings of the world.

⁴ CL (Critical Literacy).

This formative nature present in the online English workshops is supported by the view of teaching and learning English defended by the Common National Curricular Base (Brazil, 2018), henceforth BNCC. Even though the document does not contemplate teaching English in the early years of Basic Education, it is possible to establish a dialogue with the extension project presented here, since, according to the BNCC,

learning the English language encourages the creation of new forms of engagement and students' participation in an increasingly globalized and plural social world, in which the boundaries between countries, and personal, local, regional, national and transnational interests are increasingly blurred and contradictory. Thus, the study of the English language can provide everyone with access to the linguistic knowledge necessary for engagement and participation, contributing to the critical agency of students and to the exercise of active citizenship, in addition to expanding the possibilities of interaction and mobility, opening new paths for building knowledge and continuing studies. (Brazil, 2018, p. 241)

The English language LICOMzinho understands the child here and now, as a socio-historically situated individual, based on their singularities. Considering such aspects, the formative nature of the project encompasses a process that does not begin only in the final years of elementary school, which is the context in which the proposal for teaching and learning English is inserted in the BNCC. Thus, it is possible to associate this view with the extension project as a whole, that is, with all the additional languages offered: English, French, German, Italian, Modern Greek and Spanish. It can even be verified that the proposal for meaningful and critical linguistic education included in the Base is maintained, as in the abovementioned passage, the term “English language” is replaced by “additional language.”

Thus, it can be said that “Learning an additional language encourages the creation of new forms of engagement and the participation of students in an increasingly globalized and plural social world, [...]” (Brazil, 2018, p. 241). Still in the same excerpt, it could be said that “[...] the study of an additional language can provide everyone with access to the linguistic knowledge necessary for engagement and participation, contributing to students' critical agency and to the exercise of active citizenship, [...]” (Brasil, 2018, p. 241)⁵.

In view of the above, it is understandable that the meaningful (Costa, 2022) and critical (Pennycook, 2004, 2021; Tilio, 2017) perspective on English language teaching adopted in the LICOMzinho online workshops extends to the proposal for teaching materials developed in the extension project.

⁵ Amendments made by the author.

4 A few words about teaching MATERIALS

Although the textbook is the material that is most present in (additional) language classes (Dias, 2009; Ramos, 2009), it is part of the teaching activity to adapt, complement and even replace them, so that they correspond to the teacher's objectives and the needs of their students. In this sense, developing teaching materials becomes a fundamental aspect for professionals in initial or continuing education.

I share with Tomlinson (2011, 2016) the concept that teaching materials can be any materials used by teachers and students in order to promote knowledge and engage them in experiences with the language. This includes, in addition to didactic sequences, videos, DVDs, emails, YouTube, dictionaries, grammar books, readings, exercise books or photocopies of exercises, newspapers, food packages, photographs, live lectures given by native (or non-native)⁶ speakers, instructions provided by a teacher, tasks written on cards, and debates between students. This wide range of materials may include informational materials, which provide information about the language learned; instructional materials, which guide language practice; experiential, which provide experiences in the language in use; thought-provoking, which encourage the learner to use the language; and exploratory, which help to make discoveries about the language in use. In defending an English teaching and learning process in which children not only learn the language, but also use that language to continue learning (Donato, 2000), I also understand that the same teaching material can perform all these functions (Tomlinson, 2016).

Consequently, I see teaching materials as something that is at the service of teachers and students and not the other way around. I therefore deny the tyrannical role of mastering the content and teaching approaches, inasmuch that the material does not determine the teaching objectives and does not become the objectives themselves. Unfortunately, in some cases, the teaching material is imposed by the educational institution. In addition to this, the situations in which teachers, constrained by the various problems that plague Brazilian public education, such as compliance with workloads in two or more schools, excessive number of students per class and scarcity of resources, end up adopting a teaching material as the only source of information and class content.

⁶ My emphasis.

The view of teaching material that I defend in this article relates to another aspect: the role of teachers as material developers. Tomlinson (2010) points out that many experienced teachers rely on their own intuitions about what works in terms of the activities that they generally use and that seem to meet their objectives. Although this practice is possible, I align with the idea that materials development is guided by learning principles (Tomlinson, 2010; 2013) involving: theories of language acquisition and development, teaching principles, our knowledge about how the additional language is used, and the results of systematic observations and evaluations of materials in use. In the case of the English language LICOMzinho, these principles are present in the meaningful (Costa, 2022) and critical (Pennycook, 2004, 2021; Tilio, 2017) perspectives that underpin the project. Therefore, the proposal for teaching materials developed in the online workshops dialogues with the view that materials development is both a practice, which includes the production, evaluation, adaptation, and exploration of materials designed for language learning, and a field of study, which investigates the principles and procedures of design, writing, implementation, evaluation, and analysis of materials (Tomlinson, 2010; 2013).

Two other aspects that are also relevant to the development of teaching materials are the ways in which students experience language and affective and cognitive engagement (Tomlinson, 2010; 2011; 2013; 2016). The first aspect relates to a teaching of English based on meaningful practices (Costa, 2022), for in situating teaching based on children's world experiences with which they identify, it is possible for them to experience the language in an authentic way. I am therefore concerned with the response that a certain text, oral or written, verbal or non-verbal, may provoke in children, and not with the fact that the text is genuine, that is, derived from a real context. In this sense, authenticity is not something given, but rather a quality that is built in the interactions established between students and texts.

Considering the importance of children's responses to the proposed materials, the issue of affective and cognitive engagement, which such a response can provide, also plays a fundamental role. Mishan and Timmis (2015) indicate familiarity as a way of generating empathy, defined by the authors as an identification with the language of learning and the cultures in which it is constituted as a language. Again, a work conducted by means of meaningful practices (Costa, 2022) is configured as an opportunity to foster this engagement by identifying children with the themes that contextualize the workshops and their activities. It is worth highlighting here the relevance of students identifying themselves positively not only in relation to the language of learning and the

teaching material, but also to the learning environment, the teacher and their classmates (Tomlinson, 2010; 2013).

Recognizing the central role of teaching materials in teaching practices in (additional) languages goes hand in hand with the need to put the issue into perspective. Designing materials presents itself as a challenge for many teachers who face adversities in their working contexts. Therefore, developing a didactic sequence for teaching English with children, either for carrying out an extension project or for working in the classroom, is an activity that, in most cases, is not part of the teaching career attributions in Brazilian public schools, since there is no dedicated workload for this purpose, and studies on materials development are not present in most degree courses.

In view of this scenario, the LICOMzinho extension project is consolidated as an enriching opportunity for training the students who work in the workshops, as it allows them to experience teaching materials development during their undergraduate courses.

5 MATERIALizing the proposal

In this section I bring the theoretical and methodological assumptions that underlie the design of teaching materials for the online English language workshops. For this purpose, I organize this moment into two subsections. In the first subsection, the conceptions of language, as well as those of teaching and learning discussed above, are divided into three elements that guide the materials proposal, namely, Contextualization, Conceptualization, and Transformation. In the second subsection, I present how these elements materialize in a didactic sequence developed in the LICOMzinho's online English language workshops.

5.1 The LICOMzinho triad of meaningful and critical English language teaching: Contextualization, Conceptualization, and Transformation

In order to materialize the meaningful and critical English language teaching developed in the extension project, the proposal discussed here is guided by three aspects that emanate from the conceptions of language and of teaching and learning that inform the online workshops. In this subsection, I define what I understand by Contextualization, Conceptualization, and Transformation. It should be explained that this order of presentation is not a rigid structure repeated throughout the teaching materials designed for the workshops, as will be shown in the next subsection. In deciding on this order, I seek to establish a dialogue with the concepts discussed

in the previous section, through the same theoretical movements constructed when presenting the meaningful (Costa, 2022) and critical (Pennycook, 2004, 2021; Tilio, 2017) perspective of English language teaching that informs the LICOMzinho workshops.

The first theoretical move I make is to build an intersection between Contextualization and the concept of meaningful practices (Costa, 2022). The teaching material proposal developed in the online English workshops is based on the social contexts of which children are part. I am therefore talking about situations and issues that are familiar to children, considering the interactions built with the people with whom they live. In this sense, we contextualize the teaching materials based on practices that may be relevant, that is, meaningful for children.

In the English language LICOMzinho, Contextualization is materialized into three macro areas: Talk about yourself, My place and My place in the world⁷. Based on these three macro areas, thematic axes are designed so that Contextualization can be constructed based on situations that are familiar to the children. In “Talking about yourself,” one of the thematic axes is “Getting to know your classmates and teacher on the first day of class,” developed during the first week of the workshops, in which greetings and exchange of personal information in the language of learning are discussed.

Contextualization includes questions such as “In what situations is this used?” and “Why is this relevant?” Thus, the choices about what content to work on and how this can be done are informed by the possible social contexts in which the content to be worked on can be experienced by children. For example, before working on numbers in English, Contextualization questions can provide guidance on meaningful practices (Costa, 2022) in which knowing numbers in English makes sense to children. Thus, the theme of the lesson is not the numbers in English, but rather the social context in which this content is used.

The second theoretical movement concerns Conceptualization. Once the contexts in which the contents will be developed have been established, the time has come to think about the genres of discourse (Bakhtin, 1997) that emerge from those same contexts. It should be noted that this is not merely about identification, as the (re)production, circulation, and consumption of texts is also at stake. In this sense, Conceptualization allows us to question “What text is this?”, “What does it mean?”, “What is it for?”, “How is it structured?”, “Who is the text for?”, “Who is the text not for?”, “Why is it read this way or that way?”, “What effects can it cause?” etc., so that the constitutive

⁷ The macro areas were developed at the first workshop planning meetings, in early 2023, collaboratively with the scholarship students under my guidance and based on the readings and discussions carried out at the meetings.

elements of the discourse genres (thematic content, compositional form, and style) can be explored.

Far from being an exhaustive list, the questions that guide Conceptualization are intended to provoke reflections that inform choices regarding the texts themselves and the way in which they are worked on. By materializing these reflections within the framework of the English language LICOMzinho, it is possible to develop activities that lead children to identify how the oral and written texts that circulate in their social interactions work, which they also (re)produce and consume. It is part of these activities to provide opportunities for children to problematize how these texts functions and how the contexts in which they circulate are (re)produced and consumed, providing spaces for developing a critical language education as early as in the childhood.

I emphasize that when speaking of genres of discourse (Bakhtin, 1997), I consider the hypersemiotization present in social practices. Therefore, it is necessary that Conceptualization, as well as Contextualization and Transformation, also encompass multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, 2015) and consider the different ways of constructing meaning present in the most diverse cultural contexts.

The third and last theoretical movement in this subsection is Transformation. This moment in the proposal of teaching materials consists of a stage aimed at expanding, applying, and adapting the knowledge constructed. This means that the activities designed are not limited to promoting changes in the learning processes developed during the online English language workshops. In addition, it seeks to make children critically aware of possibilities of change in the social practices that surround them.

For this end, the Transformation questions reflect on “How to use knowledge in a relevant way?” and “How to appropriate knowledge?” In the English language LICOMzinho, the activities designed are intended to introduce children to ways of making constructed knowledge tangible by means of tasks that make sense to them and that are not restricted to the thematic axes that situate additional language teaching in the online workshops.

More than culminating projects, Transformation aims at creating ways of engaging children and fostering their agency during the learning process. In this way, English language teaching assumes its formative character, informed by a meaningful and critical proposal that translates into a linguistic education designed for and with children in the here and now, based on their singularities as socio-historically situated subjects.

Next (Tab. 1), I return to LICOMzinho's triad of meaningful and critical English language teaching, its definitions and questions that seek to guide the selection of topics, texts, and activities.

Table 1: Systematization of the meaningful and critical English language teaching triad at LICOMzinho.

CONTEXTUALIZATION (Meaningful Practices)	CONCEPTUALIZATION ((Re)production, circulation, and consumption of texts)	TRANSFORMATION (Expansion, application, and adaptation of knowledge)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what situations is this used? • Why is this relevant? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What text is that? • What does it mean? • What is it for? • How is it structured? • Who is the text for? • Who is the text not good for? • Why is it read this way or that way? • What effects can they cause? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to use knowledge in a relevant way? • How to appropriate knowledge?

Source: designed by the author of this article.

In the next subsection, I bring a didactic sequence developed in the 2024 workshops in which the Contextualization, Conceptualization, and Transformation movements are materialized in texts and activities guided by the conceptions of language and of teaching and learning discussed in this article.

5.2 James, *The Micro Mayor*: materializing LICOMzinho's meaningful and critical English language teaching

The didactic sequence described here, conducted in the workshops from June 17, 2024, to July 12, 2024, is one of the examples of teaching materials designed by the LICOMzinho English language team. The purpose of this subsection is to present a possibility of translating the meaningful and critical teaching proposal developed in the online workshops at the extension project. Due to copyright issues, the slides produced on the Canva platform will not be available. Thus, the didactic sequence will be described and interpreted in the light of the Contextualization, Conceptualization, and Transformation triad.

The title of the didactic sequence *James, The Micro Mayor* concerns an excerpt from a TV program that inspired the material. This is an excerpt from the American talk show series *Little Big Shots*, aired on NBC from March 8, 2016, to May 24, 2020, and hosted by Steve Harvey. The video that inspired the didactic sequence is an interview with James Tufts, a 3-year-old boy who was elected mayor of the city of Dorset, Minnesota, in 2015.⁸

The didactic sequence was constructed based on the video at three different moments: before the video, during the video and after the video. In “before the video,” the activities aim to situate the children in the context of the video. The purpose of the “during the video” is to explore information that is specific to the video. The purpose of “after the video,” on the other hand, is to expand the content of the video and promote critical discussions on one or more aspects presented in the text.

In order to make sense of the didactic sequence, the preparation begins with Contextualization and, for this purpose, the starting point for the “before the video” activities is to explore the meaningful practices (Costa, 2022) that dialogue with the content of the video. Therefore, this moment is dedicated to situating children in the context of the video and preparing them for what they are going to watch. The thematic axis developed is “Participation in a television program and the type of information provided,” and at “before the video” the children are exposed to multiple-choice questions, in English, which introduce them to the thematic axis. The objective is for children to answer, orally, in the additional language, questions such as: “Have you ever been to a TV show?”, “You are going to take part in a TV show. Who would you go with?” and “What would you say on the show?”

After introducing the thematic axis, the children watch the video and answer some specific questions about James Tufts’ participation in the TV show. In “during the video,” the activities are aimed at verifying children’s understanding of the oral text, through questions about the TV host and the interviewee (questions about name, age, phrases spoken by the interviewee etc.). All questions are multiple-choice and in English. To help children understand and not transform activities into a memory game, video screenshots are placed next to each question, referring to the moment in the TV show that the question is about. Just as the questions and answer options construct meanings, the images derived from the video also have meaning. In this way, children

⁸ Video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZLLqapzxRQ&t=132s>. Access on: Dec. 31, 2024.

can read the images in order to understand the questions and arrive at the answers, evidencing an approach based on multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, 2015).

It should be noted that this approach is present in all materials used in the online English language workshops. Regarding the slides, one of the most used resources in the workshops, just as coursebooks are used in schools, multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, 2015) are considered when choosing the *layout*, font type and size, colors, images etc., because we understand that the meanings constructed by these elements must be in constant dialogue with the themes of the workshops. One of the possibilities provided by Canva are thematic layouts, a characteristic that dialogues with the situated English language teaching developed in the extension project. In this sense, the themes of the *layouts* are always aligned with the themes of the workshops, since we consider that children's familiarization with the meaningful practices (Costa, 2022) that inform the teaching materials proposal also occurs during the interaction between the children and the slides designed by the teachers.

Back to “during the video,” it is important to point out that by exploring the thematic axis we are developing Contextualization. In addition to situating work with the English language on the basis of meaningful practices (Costa, 2022), we enable children to engage in a situation that is familiar to them and that, therefore, makes the use of the additional language be filled with meaning. By constructing interactions between the children and the video content, through oral text comprehension questions and screenshots, we provide opportunities for children to see examples of situations in which saying their name and age in English, for example, becomes relevant.

Then, in “after the video,” in order to expand the thematic axis, we start talking about “A mayor's work and the positive and negative aspects of their city.” Taking advantage of the fact that the didactic sequence had as its starting point the interview of a three-year-old boy who became mayor in his city, we asked the children “What does a mayor do?” As in the previous moments, the question is asked in English. The difference is that it is an open question and can be answered in Portuguese, since the objective, at this moment, is to explore children's knowledge of the world. Another characteristic of this moment in the didactic sequence is the space for critical reflection (Pennycook, 2004, 2021; Tilio, 2017) regarding the role of a mayor. The question “What does a mayor do?” provides an opportunity for children to position themselves ideologically with regard to what they know and what they don't know about the work of a mayor, in addition to sharing their readings of the world and points of view.

Still within Contextualization, we situate this moment starting from the image of James Tufts as mayor of the city of Dorset to ask the children where they are from. Here, the question “Where are you from?” is not limited to eliciting what the children’s nationality is. Our purpose is to know what city the children are from, considering that the audience at LICOMzinho consists of children from 8 to 11 years old from different parts of Brazil. Although most of the children in the English language workshops are from Rio de Janeiro, they belong to different parts of the city, such as the Baixada Fluminense and the coastal region. And depending on the children’s location, the answers to the next question may vary.

After the children say where they are from, we ask “Who is the mayor of your city?” We present an image of Eduardo Paes, mayor of the city of Rio de Janeiro in 2023 and re-elected for office from January 2, 2025, to January 1, 2029, because we cannot consider that all children know who we are talking about. In order to prevent LICOMzinho’s English workshops from being “Riocentered,” we include children from other locations in Rio de Janeiro and ask them to tell us who is the mayor where they live. In order to do so, we advise them to search the Internet or even ask the adults who are at home.

Even when it comes to Contextualization, this stage of the didactic sequence also encompasses Transformation, since we not only situate knowledge, but also expand and connect it with children’s local contexts. This occurs when we give a new meaning to the question “Where are you from?”, and when we talk about the mayors of the places where they live. This integration between Contextualization and Transformation demonstrates that LICOMzinho’s triad of meaningful and critical English language teaching is not a formula to be applied as per a strict order and pre-established procedures that are always repeated in the same way in all materials and in all workshops. What is seen are movements that take place according to the objectives to be developed. Even the absence of Conceptualization activities after Contextualization is yet another demonstration of how the three aspects that underpin the design of teaching materials for the English workshops flow between themselves.

Another characteristic of the material at this stage is the fact that we consider children as socio-historically situated subjects and who, therefore, can also talk about the mayors of their cities and the work that these mayors do, from their point of view as residents. Children’s reading of the world and, consequently, their critical stance (Pennycook, 2004, 2021; Tilio, 2017) in the face of the social practices of which they are part, is once again brought to the center of the workshops as

they build a list with the positive and negative aspects regarding where they live. At this stage of the material, they are also expected to answer in Portuguese.

Continuing the Contextualization and based on the list made by the children, the following activity aims at working on vocabulary in English related to means of transportation, schools and hospitals. To answer the question “If you were the mayor of your city, what problems would you solve?”, children are presented with four options: a) Public transportation problems; b) Public education problems; c) Public hospital problems; and d) All of them. The children are then presented with words, accompanied by their respective images, related to alternatives “a,” “b” and “c,” such as bus, subway, train; teacher, classroom, whiteboard; and doctor, nurse, ambulance, respectively. The words, not necessarily in that order, are shown with the aid of the Google Slides tool and through the magnifying glass effect they are revealed to the children little by little as the effect is triggered. The objective is for children to say, in English, what the words are and to categorize them according to the alternatives “a,” “b” and “c.” In yet another moment of critical reflection (Pennycook, 2004, 2021; Tilio, 2017), when discussing the problems in the places where they live, children have the opportunity to problematize their realities and the contexts that surround them, as well as to think of solutions to the issues that afflict them.

Once this activity has been carried out, the thematic axis becomes “The meaning of the vote and the function of an electoral pamphlet.” Even if the focus changes as the didactic sequence is developed, it should be noted that the meaningful practices (Costa, 2022) on which the activities are based are an offshoot of the James Tufts interview excerpt that inspired the preparation of the material. As important as informing the choices that are made throughout the didactic sequence is building a link between meaningful practices (Costa, 2022) that fill with meaning each activity to be carried out.

In this moment in Contextualization, children deal with questions such as “What does it mean to vote? and What do we vote for?” Through these open questions and images related to the subject, such as the image of an electronic ballot box, children are invited to share their previous knowledge about what the vote means, in addition to reflecting critically (Pennycook, 2004, 2021; Tilio, 2017) on the subject.

Then, we begin the Conceptualization stage using the discursive genre (Bakhtin, 1997) electoral pamphlet. The objective is to work on the thematic content, compositional form and style of a text that is part of the meaningful practices (Costa, 2022) related to electoral voting and elections and, in the specific case of this didactic sequence, mayor elections. With this purpose in

mind, we present a pamphlet in Portuguese, prepared on Canva, containing the following information: candidate photo, name, number, party initials, desired position, and campaign slogan. The objective is to explore, in English, the characteristics of the genre in Portuguese and then explore an English-language pamphlet based on children's knowledge of the discursive genre (Bakhtin, 1997) in their native language. To prepare the pamphlet, we created the POL (LWP) party (LICOMzinho Workshops Party). This information will be used in the pamphlet in English and in the written text that the children will produce.

In keeping with the story of James Tufts, the English language electoral pamphlet features James' older brother, Robert Tufts, who was also mayor of Dorset and who is making a special appearance in the interview, as a candidate for mayor. With the same type of information presented in the Portuguese text, the pamphlet in English is also explored so that children identify the constitutive elements of this discursive genre (Bakhtin, 1997).

In order to enable the expansion, application, and adaptation of the knowledge built, it is time for the Transformation movement. The proposal is for children to run for mayor by the POL and to create their pamphlets in English. The texts are posted on the class Padlet, and each child presents their campaign orally. Children are guided throughout the creative process and revisit the elements that were explored in the discursive pamphlet genre. In this sense, they are monitored by the teachers as they define each piece of information in the pamphlet, such as the choice of number and drafting the slogan. For the candidate's photo, children can use a photo or a drawing. For the party, everyone is affiliated with the POL. In addition to the step-by-step instructions for producing the flyer, children also receive guidance on how to use Padlet.

After the pamphlets have been prepared, the children orally submit their candidacy to run for mayor by the POL. The task culminates in the integrated development of writing and oral skills, providing children with a moment of expansion, application, and adaptation of the knowledge built throughout the didactic sequence. In addition, it is worth noting the critical potential (Pennycook, 2004, 2021; Tilio, 2017) of the final task. Creating the campaign *slogan* is a way to inspire and develop children's problematizing stance. Inspired by discussions about the functions of a mayor and the problems that exist in the places where they live, children are able to see themselves as agents of change within their communities.

Next, I present my final remarks regarding the proposal for didactic teaching and learning materials outlined in this article. In order to do so, I return to the aspects that underlie LICOMzinho's

meaningful and critical English language teaching, in addition to signaling future unfoldings for the studies and research that emanate from this extension project.

Final remarks

Far from being a recipe, the proposal for teaching materials discussed in this article aims to highlight the importance of making informed choices that may reflect what is meant by language and by teaching and learning English with children. The position that crosses the pedagogical practices of LICOMzinho's online English language workshops understands language as discourse, built in/by means of social interactions. Therefore, the teaching and learning process also takes place socially. And if children are subjects in the world and of the world, there is nothing fairer than teaching English in a way that is also being embedded in the world, or rather, in the worlds.

In this perspective, English language teaching becomes meaningful because it reflects and refracts the various social practices in which children engage. Given the variety of contexts of which this additional language is part, it is essential that multiple readings of the world, points of view, and perspectives be problematized in order to prevent unique stories (Adichie, 2009) from being told. Thus, English language teaching also becomes critical when it adopts a questioning stance developed as a process, together with the children. Not in the sense of teaching them to be critical, a task that I believe is not possible, but as a possibility for reflection, in order to provide opportunities for them to read the world in different ways, with different points of view and perspectives.

The Contextualization, Conceptualization, and Transformation triad is not intended to offer ready-made and finished models for designing English teaching materials for and with children. These three aspects are a way of translating and systematizing the meaningful and critical perspective that informs the LICOMzinho online English language workshops. By distancing ourselves from teaching conceptions that reproduce language in a social and uncritical vacuum, without any connection with children's knowledge of the world, we come closer to the children themselves and to the issues they deal with on a daily basis.

Thinking of how to further strengthen these ties, the next step of the English language LICOMzinho is to develop research to investigate children's perception of the meaningful and critical teaching that underpins the online English workshops. In order to do so, I will monitor the

workshops delivered to one of the classes and interview the children in this class. My purpose is to observe the interactions between the children and the teacher, between the children and the teaching materials, and between the children themselves, to understand how meaningful and critical teaching echoes the practices developed during the workshops. Along with these observations, the interviews will be another space to hear the children's voice about what may be meaningful to them. Our perspective as the English language team at LICOMzinho materializes in the slides and activities we developed. Now it's time to hear the children's voices. It's over to them.

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