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**IMPROVING WRITING THROUGH
CREATIVITY
- A SET OF ACTIVITIES**



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- A Set of Activities

by

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Abstract

This project is the result of an attempt to answer the question “Can Creative Writing Be Taught?” proposed by Francine Prose (2007), in the first chapter of her book *Reading Like a Writer*. It also aims to show the difficulties of implementing such a project in the classroom, due to factors such as lack of time, the pressure of teaching a very tight syllabus, and the working conditions students and teachers have in order to succeed.

In order to implement the project, a series of activities was set up. Through music, paintings, drawings, hand paintings and other materials, the students produced words and simple sentences, which were enlarged so as to become complex sentences and paragraphs. Each piece of material was prepared bearing in mind the ideas the students had produced during the previous session, so that a connection could be established between all elements. The main purpose of these strategies was to lead the students into writing a story.

Lastly, this project aims at showing how the different creative writing activities contributed to a greater awareness of individual writing errors and error-correction, improving the students’ writing skill as a whole.

Key words: creativity; writing; error correction; project work; strategies.

DESENVOLVER A ESCRITA ATRAVÉS DA CRIATIVIDADE

– Um Conjunto de Actividades

por

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Resumo

Este projecto é o resultado da resposta à pergunta “Pode a Escrita Criativa Ser Ensinada?” – feita por Francine Prose (2007) no primeiro capítulo do livro *Ler Como um Escritor*. Pretende também mostrar as dificuldades que surgiram durante a sua implementação devido a factores como a falta de tempo, a pressão que adveio do ensino de um programa extremamente exigente, e as condições de trabalho que alunos e professores deveriam ter, de forma a obterem bons resultados.

Para que o projecto fosse implementado, foi organizado um conjunto de actividades. Através da música, da pintura, do desenho, da pintura à mão e de outros recursos, os alunos produziram palavras e frases simples que depois foram ampliadas e transformadas em frases complexas e parágrafos. O material foi preparado tendo por base as ideias produzidas pelos alunos em cada uma das aulas, para que houvesse ligação entre todos os elementos, e tendo como principal objectivo levar os alunos a escrever uma história.

Finalmente, este projecto visa mostrar a forma como as diversas actividades contribuíram para uma maior ponderação de cada aluno sobre os seus próprios erros e consequente correcção dos mesmos, desenvolvendo, desse modo, a escrita na sua globalidade.

Palavras-chave: criatividade; escrita; correcção do erro; trabalho de projecto; estratégias.

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1. Introduction

One of my main concerns as a teacher of English at secondary school level is to ensure that students reach the level of proficiency recommended by the syllabus - *Programa de Inglês para o Ensino Secundário, Nível de Continuação, 10º, 11º e 12º Anos* -, both in speaking and in writing. However, in spite of all the efforts, year after year teachers are confronted with the same problem – students show great difficulty in both skills. When they are asked what the source of the problem is, they often come forward with several reasons such as the high level of absences of teachers in *Ensino Básico*, teachers who teach grammar without contextualising it and the students' natural lack of aptitude for learning languages, leading them towards a total lack of motivation.

The beginning of each school year constitutes very hard work both for teachers who aim at leading students towards excellence, and for students who really look forward to learning. After the first three weeks of revisions proposed by the syllabus - *Programa de Inglês para o Ensino Secundário, Nível de Continuação, 10º, 11º e 12º Anos* -, teachers all too often reach the conclusion that students have fair results in grammar, simply by memorising it and then applying it in exercises they are already familiar with. Where listening and reading are concerned, they seem to understand a fair amount of vocabulary and structures which allow them to capture the message that is being conveyed.

Where productive skills are concerned, when students have to produce a minimal amount of spoken text, very often they say they cannot do it, either because they really lack vocabulary, or because they are afraid of speaking in front of their peers. It often takes a whole year's work, going from simple group tasks to pair work to individual work, in order to get them acquainted both with the different social forms of work and with the individual production of the spoken language.

As for the writing skill, students also complain about lack of vocabulary, often relying on teachers to tell them how certain words are written, forgetting the dictionary as an essential tool to help them along the way. When facing a diagnostic test, students create a barrier, and very often teachers are confronted with a blank page to start from.

Many teachers at higher levels question themselves about how young people learn to write. Many strategies primary school teachers use to introduce Portuguese

children to writing would be welcomed by those who teach English as a foreign language.

Writing comes in many forms and serves many purposes. After speaking, it is for many people the most favourite means of communication. Some people write to release opinions on a chosen subject, others produce thoughts and feelings, while others still go beyond the obvious and exercise the power of imagination, freeing the child within, and creating a magical world only a few can understand. Such is the world of creative writing.

The very first line of the book *Reading Like a Writer*, by Francine Prose (2007:1), was of major importance in finding the purpose of this project. “*Can creative writing be taught?*” In a small universe such as the classroom, in which teachers often deal with twenty-eight to thirty students with different levels of understanding and difficulties, this question did raise doubts as to whether it would be possible to implement this creative writing project in class, given the fact that it is known that most students do not master enough vocabulary and language structures, lacking perhaps the most important ingredient of all – creativity - as they are not aware of it and are not used to putting it to good use. Students are usually able to produce very interesting and creative texts when writing in their mother tongue; if they are given enough time, if the topic interests them and the amount of vocabulary appropriate, they are usually able to create interesting stories. But would the same happen in a foreign language? To find out was the aim of this project, this creative writing adventure.

Having tenth-grade students of a *Curso Científico-Humanístico de Línguas e Humanidades* does not always mean having the best students - those who speak, read and write fluently without any difficulty. There are certainly some whose language competence is good, but very often teachers find others whose competence is average or even low. How can teachers motivate such students to learn more vocabulary, to enjoy playing with words in order to improve their sentences, which will then become solid texts, thus improving both the language they are learning and their imagination? That is what this Project Work is about – improving the students’ writing ability through a set of creative activities, allowing them to use their imagination freely in order to produce creative texts. For this purpose, they were to work with different visuals, music, and other materials.

2. Teaching context

Mafra, a small town which is forty-five kilometres away from Lisbon, is well-known for the greatness of its Baroque monument, the National Palace of Mafra, its gardens and the Tapada, famous for King John V's wild boar hunts. This town offers a very simple, quiet life to its inhabitants, although filled with cultural events throughout the year.

The school (Appendix 4) has lovely surroundings filled with many green spaces both students and teachers enjoy. Being the only secondary school in the area, it brings together 167 teachers, about 1000 students attending day classes and 350 students attending night classes. It also serves its community by having what is now called a *Centro de Novas Oportunidades*, giving adults the opportunity to further their studies and perhaps go to University.

The school is structured as follows:

Block A

On the ground floor of this building the “administrative services”, the teachers’ room, the switchboard, and a small First-Aid room can be found.

On the top floor, the *Conselho Executivo* is joined by the *Centro de Novas Oportunidades*, and the Library, which has a *Centro de Recursos* incorporated, and where students and teachers can have access to all kinds of resources.

Block B

This building is mainly composed of normal classrooms, except for one big room on the ground floor which is a private area for Class Teachers to work in.

Block C

The ground floor of this building is where the Biology Laboratories are located, and the top floor has simple classrooms and two computer classrooms, where not only students of New Technologies have their lessons, but teachers have also in-training sessions.

Block D

The ground floor holds two well-equipped Chemistry laboratories as well as two normal classrooms, and the top floor has other classrooms.

Block E

The ground floor of this building holds an open space where all the school's exhibitions take place. On the opposite side the school hall can be found, in which in-training workshop sessions of all kinds and students' presentations take place, as well as performances on stage. It is an area that welcomes both inside and outside events.

Block F

This building is located at the end of a big corridor opposite Block E and it is an area where students and teachers can enjoy their meals, for this space holds the school canteen and cafeteria.

A well-equipped stationary department and the *Associação de Estudantes* can also be found.

Surrounding the buildings we find a race track, a volleyball field, plenty of green areas, soon to be recovered, and finally, the school pond, a Biology project, surrounded by checkers tables and stone benches on which students and teachers can sit and relax, or even teach a lesson or two.

Throughout the school year, teachers, students and the *Auxiliares da Acção Educativa* work together on various projects in order to turn the school into a live working environment. Field trips, competitions that involve the students in both national and international events such as going to Strasbourg to the European Parliament to defend a project and the good name of the school, and bringing the winner's cup home, activities such as the Christmas Hampers for needy families and other fund-raising activities such as the *Tasquinhas Saloias*, make our school one of the most lively, well-organised and well-run schools in the western district of Lisbon.

The new school

Mafra is an area that is undergoing a growing process of development as many people who work in Lisbon and once lived in the nearby surrounding areas chose to move to a quieter environment. As a consequence of this sudden movement, the area is becoming larger and larger, and the school, as the only secondary school in the area, is becoming rather small to accommodate the many students who seek to attend it.

In order to improve the premises, the School Board applied for a special Project created by the Ministry of Education, aiming at the enlargement and entire renovation of the school, which will be fully completed in the coming year (Appendix 5).

3. The target group

The target group is one of three 10th grade classes of the *Curso Científico-Humanístico de Línguas e Humanidades*. It is a class of twenty-eight students - twenty-two girls and six boys. Their ages range between fourteen and seventeen years old. Most of the students came from nearby *EB 2,3* schools in Mafra, Ericeira and Venda do Pinheiro. Some also came from Sintra, which is not far away, and two students came from private schools.

The students' families are from varied social backgrounds. Most parents have very low-class occupations, some of them working as construction workers, house cleaners and housewives. Five of these students benefit from the State Social Services (*SASE*), meaning that they are on a subsidy to buy coursebooks and make use of public transportation.

The students have very varied interests with which they occupy their free time. When they were asked about their leisure time activities, most of them answered that watching films and documentaries, listening to music, going out with friends and reading were the activities they favoured the most.

Many are the students who practise sports – indoor football, table-tennis, step, riding a bicycle, surfing, bodyboard, sailing, swimming, practising yoga, going to the gym, and horse-riding, aiming at participating in national and international competitions, and being a horse-rider in bullfighting events. All the students consider that practising sports is important for the health of the body and mind.

One group of students seem to be very artistic-minded, as they play the guitar, the piano and the transverse flute, considering music as an important part of their lives.

Outside school, some of them have other activities such as drawing, painting, ballroom dancing, being an ambulance lifesaver, attending boy-scout meetings and volunteering in an old-age home.

When asked about what they could do as students to improve their knowledge of English, most of them answered that watching films with English subtitles, reading English books, speaking to family and friends in English when possible, as is the case of one of the students who came from the United States of America, and taking a course in

English to improve vocabulary and writing would be a good way to gain improvement. It was interesting to notice that the three students who came from Eastern Europe considered that translating texts, studying grammar and using the dictionary more often would be a good way to overcome major difficulties, thus showing different learning strategies.

Finally, two students were of the opinion that going overseas is always the most enjoyable and the most productive way of learning and improving the language. Therefore, in the light of this, in March 2009, they went to Scotland on a cultural field trip and, indeed, major changes occurred, both in speaking and writing.

4. Review of relevant literature

*“Most people won’t realize that writing is a craft.
You have to take your apprenticeship in it like anything else.”*

Katherine Ann Porter ¹

For many years I believed that the ability to write is a gift people are born with, which is present and detected at a very early stage, or it will not appear at all. As time passed, this idea gained greater proportions as I observed children playing; the favourite target being a piece of paper or the white wall of a favourite room in the house, their crayons would always find a way of scribbling or drawing something.

Opinions do change and I slowly became aware that writing is a craft that can be learnt, and practised over time so as to achieve mastery. As Prose (2007:4) refers, “*we learn to write by practice, hard work, by repeated trial and error, success and failure, and from the books we admire.*” Writing is not only about personal endeavour, but also about coming into contact with good books, by reading selected authors, and by extracting from them their *savoir faire*, something that can be rather difficult as reading habits are becoming scarce. As the teaching / learning phase occurs, factors such as lack of time, overcoming a tight school syllabus, extracurricular activities that consume most of the students’ free time, and error penalisation may prevent students from learning the skill, making it hard for teachers to teach it in an organised way.

On the other hand, a methodically-organised classroom with a good working environment, in which students are led by a friendly teacher to work with independence and responsibility are factors that will make writing a successful venture. Those factors will be here forth referred to in more detail.

¹ in Harmer, J. (2004:31)

I – Dealing with time

*“To say that today’s teachers are pressed for time is a gross understatement.”*²

Throughout school life, many are the moments during which, through writing, students show what they have learnt, particularly when, at the end of the three-year cycle they sit for their final exams. Everyday life will cause them to encounter “*real purpose tasks*” (Harmer, 2004:40) which will require from them the necessary fluency and accuracy they will have gained previously during their school years. That being so, writing needs to be practised so that the desired level of proficiency can be attained.

Various writers are of the opinion that for it to occur, students and teachers must dedicate a considerable amount of time to practise during the week; lessons must be planned in such a way that they contemplate a specific period of time for it to be developed.

In the article “All Children Can Write”, Donald Graves (1985:4), states that “*children need to write a minimum of 4 days a week to see any appreciable change in the quality of their writing.*” This implies that each day of the week should offer students the opportunity to express thoughts, ideas and feelings through writing, allowing the skill to gain strength and make sense inside each one.

Elbow (1973:3) adds to this by saying that “*the most effective way (...) to improve your writing is to do free-writing exercises regularly. At least three times a week.*”

Graves (1985:5) mentions numerous advantages of regular writing, saying that “*it helps children to choose topics, it helps them to listen to their pieces and revise, it helps them to help each other, it helps teachers to listen to children’s texts, and it helps teachers to have greater access to children.*” From this we can infer that, through regular writing, students learn to be selective, to exercise their freedom of choice, they become more autonomous and develop the capacity of criticising their own work, thus becoming more mature, and they learn to have solidarity towards their peers. As this is a two-way process, teachers also benefit from this work, as they listen to their students, and learn to understand them, and through their writing they become more aware of the human beings who are growing up inside their classrooms.

² in Graves, D.H. & Kittle, P. (2005:1)

Moreover, according to Graves, it is also in the best interest of the students to have an audience, with whom to share the work, both with each other and with the teacher. Prose (2007:56) states that you should “*read your work aloud, if you can, if you aren’t too embarrassed by the sound of your own voice ringing out when you are alone in a room. Chances are that the sentence you can hardly pronounce without stumbling is a sentence that needs to be reworked to make it smoother and more fluent.*” This moment of sharing will take time, but it will help the students to gain self-confidence, and it will also help their peers and the teacher to ask clarifying questions so that more can be known about the student-writer. However, what is most important is that the students will get used to listening to their own texts and be self-critical.

Teachers will also benefit from extended time for writing purposes. It is in the best interest of the students that the teacher joins them in the writing venture. In the above-mentioned article, Graves (1985:8) is of the opinion that it is beneficial for the teacher to practise writing along with the students. He says that “*...teachers become acquainted with writing from the inside by actually doing it themselves.*” This way they will become aware of what they know and of what lies behind the whole writing process.

Another advantage of having more time to write throughout the week is the fact that teachers will have more opportunities to give feedback to students on their performance, thus enriching the process even further.

It is also very important to have teachers believing that students will eventually be able to write and believing in the content of what they will write. This will transmit an attitude of belief, allowing the students to become more self-confident and mature.

On the other hand, as most students need to be constantly motivated to do almost anything, having less time to write might signify losing track of what they are producing in the first place, as enthusiasm, confidence and interest in the activity - attitudes which were perhaps difficult to attain - might disappear, bringing back old anxieties, reminding them of their incapability to write, and installing in them an unwillingness to invest in the learning of the skill. For such students, “*who lack familiarity or confidence with writing (or indeed enthusiasm for it),*” Harmer (2004:61) states that “*we need to spend some time building the writing habit.*”

Bearing these opinions in mind, the conclusion is that having more time is indeed a determining factor to be taken into account. If more time is given and students write every single day, slowly the amount of work produced will increase and soon they will become aware of the enormous quantity of writing they are doing, bringing down the negative idea of incapability, and making them more conscious of their own experiences, and of what they really can achieve. In other words, growth and maturity take place.

II - Overcoming a tight school syllabus

The syllabus - *Programa de Inglês – Nível de Continuação, 10º, 11º e 12º Anos – Cursos Gerais e Cursos Tecnológicos, Formação Geral e Específica* - is based on the guidelines of the following documents:

- ❖ *Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo*, Decreto-Lei nº 46/86, de 14 de Outubro, DR nº 237 – I Série.
- ❖ Council of Europe, Council for Cultural Co-Operation (1998). *Modern Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. A Common European Framework of Reference. – Draft 2 of a Framework proposal.* Strasbourg.
- ❖ Ministério da Educação (s/d). *Línguas Estrangeiras: Competências Essenciais.* Lisboa.

The first of its nine objectives is “*desenvolver capacidades de interpretação e produção textual, demonstrando autonomia no uso das competências de comunicação.*” (p.6)

The contents of the syllabus are organised in three different components, the first of which is “*Interpretação e Produção de Texto*” (p.7), which is the core of the whole syllabus, directing the planning of all teaching-learning activities.

“A Interpretação e Produção de Texto constitui o enfoque principal deste programa. Nesta perspectiva, torna-se fundamental proporcionar aos alunos oportunidades de interpretar e produzirem textos variados em que as dimensões formais, semântica e pragmática da língua sejam trabalhadas de modo integrado. Por outro lado, as metodologias escolhidas devem centrar-se essencialmente no aluno e na sua interação com o texto.” (p.39)

The syllabus is divided into General Competences and Specific Competences, of which communicative competence is a part. At the end of the 10th and 11th grades, the students should have acquired both comprehension competences, by practising the listening and reading skills, and production competences, by practicing the speaking and writing skills. And where the latter is concerned, the syllabus presupposes that the student:

“Elabora textos claros e variados, de modo estruturado, atendendo à sua função e destinatário, dentro dos tópicos abordados nos domínios de referência, integrando a sua experiência e mobilizando conhecimentos adquiridos em outras disciplinas; demonstra capacidade de relação de informação, sintetizando-a de modo lógico e coerente.” (p.10)

According to the Council of Europe, ‘text’ is defined as “any piece of language, whether spoken utterance or a piece of writing, which users/learners receive, produce or exchange. There can thus be no act of communication through language without a text...” (Council of Europe, 2001: 3)

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (2001:85) also states that “*the text is central to any act of linguistic communication, the external, objective link between producer and receiver, whether they are communicating face to face or at a distance. The text then functions as the input to the process of language reception.*”

In the light of what has been said, it can therefore be concluded that, above all, classroom practice has to focus on text comprehension and text production.

Harmer (2004:39) defends that “*it is often hard to find writing tasks that are directly relevant to the varying needs of a class full of students from different backgrounds and occupations. The best thing we can do is to concentrate on a repertoire of writing tasks that it is reasonable to assume that most speakers of English may have to take part in at some stage in their English-speaking lives.*” However, within the outer circle of the diagram on *Intenções de Comunicação, Macrofunções do Discurso and Tipos de Texto* (p.20), proposed by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (2001) and by the *Programa de Inglês – Nível de Continuação, 10º, 11º e 12º Anos – Cursos Gerais e Cursos Tecnológicos, Formação Geral e Específica*, (Appendix 6), it becomes clear that teachers have a rich diversity of text types at their disposal, in order to allow their students to be creative within the sociocultural contents, which are as follows: *A World of Many Languages, The Technological World, The Media and Global Communication*, and *Youth in a Global World* for the 10th grade; *The World Around Us, Youth and*

Consumerism, The World of Work, and A World of Many Cultures for the 11th grade; and *English Around the World, Citizenship and Multiculturalism, Democracy in a Global World, and Cultures, Arts and Society* for the 12th grade.

Furthermore, and bearing in mind the objective for the teaching of the English language itself - “*Usar apropriada e fluentemente a Língua Inglesa, revelando interiorização das suas regras e do seu funcionamento.*” (p.31) – spread throughout the three years of the *Ensino Secundário*, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades, are a great number of grammar items and structures to be revised, practised and consolidated.

In spite of the variety and richness of the text types proposed by the syllabus, managing them in a balanced way within each topic while at the same time ‘repairing’ faulty language structures is extremely difficult and time-consuming.

III - Error penalisation

“Many people are constantly thinking about spelling and grammar as they try to write...”³

Personal experience has shown that in the past, writing was frequently used as a memorisation process through which learning occurred. Teachers believed that by copying texts children expanded their lexis, learnt language structures and improved the writing skill as a whole. Through dictation, students would show implicit knowledge of the language and, if errors occurred, they would be solved by repeated writing, as teachers believed that through repeating the word or structure a number of times, learning would eventually occur.

Alongside the pedagogical objective, writing also functioned as a form of punishment. When students misbehaved, teachers would ask them to write a sentence a given number of times, or to copy a text, in the hope that this procedure would bring a change of behaviour. Moreover, parents would punish their children at home by asking them to do the homework or to copy a text from the coursebook, and slowly children grew up thinking that writing was more like an instrument of torture rather than a source of pleasure.

As time passed, these different attitudes, together with the appearance of many forms of entertainment and communication, produced both students who no longer viewed writing as necessary and who did not take pleasure in doing it, and teachers who felt the need to make language remain as perfect as possible, thus beginning a difficult journey in search for perfection in every piece of writing.

For many years, teachers' first tendency when marking an essay has been to underline or correct wrong words or inappropriate structures, and as they did this, the students' piece of writing became impersonal, and a witness to the teachers' presence.

Veronica de Andres (2000:1), in her article “Writing from the Heart – Writing for the Soul,” corroborates this opinion, saying that “*EFL teachers are often trained to find mistakes and therefore, unknowingly, they can kill the desire to write and the writer*

³ in Elbow, P. (1973:5)

within.” She furthers this thought by recalling Donald Graves’ words when he says that “we ignore the child’s urge to show what he knows.” As we do not understand the students’ writing process, “we place unnecessary blocks in the way of their intentions.” And this can be done when marking tests or any piece of writing, when teachers tend to correct the mistake or, at least, underline it. Therefore, when students receive the work, all they visualise is a page full of red ink, passing on to them the impression that nothing they wrote is correct.

Graves (1985:8) is of the opinion that “before children go to school, their urge to express is relentless. (...) When children enter school, their urge to express is still present. (...) As children grow older and spend more time in school, many become still more disenchanted with writing. They can’t keep up with the rest of the class and equate their struggles with handwriting, spelling, and early conventions as evidence that their ideas are unacceptable and that they are less intelligent than others.” Teachers did have an obsession for text correction in the past, and still have it in the present, and this attitude, according to these words, destroys the students’ urge to express themselves, which is what must be kept alive at all costs.

Graves concludes by saying that “even for these children, the urge to express, to make worthwhile contributions, to express a meaning that affects others, does not go away.” This is a hopeful thought to hold on to.

IV – Organisation and good working atmosphere in the classroom

“Success (in foreign language learning) depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analysis, and more on what goes on inside and between people in the classroom.”

Earl Stevick ⁴

Many teachers are confronted every day with a large number of students, each combining within themselves different personalities and specific, individual working habits which produce multiple reactions towards the activities proposed in the classroom. As Arnold and Brown (1999:17) mention *“We only have to glance for a moment at any classroom to realise the number of different ways in which students are learning.”* Depending on the teachers’ personality, this can be regarded as an obstacle, preventing them from establishing a relationship with the students; however, it can also be seen as a great challenge, as it allows them to work on personal development, to search for solutions, as they attempt to reach all types of students.

At the beginning of each school year, as teachers start establishing the first contacts, it is vital to convey the message that they not only enjoy teaching but above all being with the students, and being there for them. Harmer (2004:128) points out that *“if students pick up on our enthusiasm, they might just become inspired by it.”* It is a first step towards gaining their affection and engaging them in the path of learning the language. This attitude will help stimulate positive emotional factors by creating empathy between both parties. Veronica de Andres (2000:4) stresses that *“an open heart produces an open mind,”* it is the key that unlocks the hearts and the minds of the students. Furthermore, she mentions that *“an open heart is ready to wait, to listen, to discover, to cope with frustration and uncertainty.”* Against all odds, teachers must be ready to surrender their hearts and minds to their work, in the hope of finding a glimpse of light amidst stormy waters.

⁴ in Arnold, J. (1980:4)

It is certain that teachers have many things on their minds, many important decisions to make when they begin a school year, and perhaps the greatest challenge is how to transform the extensive syllabus into something feasible, practical and time-saving for them as teachers and something that makes sense for the students. So that it can happen, organization and method are key words for both. *“Sloppy class, sloppy thinking,”* as Graves (1983:34) points out, therefore teachers must make an effort to exercise self-discipline, and pass on that message in each lesson. *“Teachers for whom their work is a source of flow, who themselves are motivated by the pleasure of participating in the learning experience, are highly motivating models for learners.”* (Arnold 1999:16) By conveying this message to the students, slowly modelling takes place, and teaching and learning become a solid and gratifying experience.

Teachers encounter many situations in the classroom which require undivided attention and tact. When learning, students show different reactions towards the different subjects, and these reactions arise due to a simple factor - motivation. According to Arnold (1999:14), it manifests itself in two ways – intrinsically and extrinsically. For some students, *“the learning experience is its own reward,”* i.e. they are intrinsically motivated, but for others it *“comes from the desire to get a reward or avoid punishment”* i.e. they are extrinsically motivated, and these two attitudes produce completely different results.

When learning English as a Foreign Language, motivation sometimes diminishes due to the difficulties students face, either because they do not have empathy with the language or because they lack basic vocabulary and structures, making it very difficult to be learnt. In the light of this, teachers must be attentive to the smallest reactions of their students as feelings of anxiety are most likely to occur. Anxiety *“is possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process. It is associated with negative feelings such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension and tension,”* stresses Arnold (1999:8). When facing an activity they cannot perform, students will naturally react negatively; when confronted with the incapacity to solve it, their self-esteem, which *“is a basic requirement for successful cognitive and affective activity,”* (Arnold 1999:12) will decrease.

In order to help the students to overcome successfully negative attitudes which might diminish their power of concentration and learning, teachers must be sensitive

and meticulous in the way they prepare the lessons and choose the activities. It is a fact that the ultimate objective of any teacher of English is to have students who speak and write freely, without constraints, but particular care should be taken with the students who show anxiety and low-self esteem. That is why Arnold (1999:11) states that *“teachers must be sensitive to learners’ reticence towards participating in tasks that require expansiveness, and overt sociability, such as drama and role-play, and lead them towards these very useful activities in a suitable manner.”*

Along with Speaking, Writing is a skill that requires from the students a considerable amount of vocabulary and language structures in order to be able to communicate adequately. In most classes, teachers find students who need individual attention and guidance in both skills. Where the Writing skill is concerned, it is possible for the teachers to devise a programme, aiming at helping students to be less anxious and become more self-confident with their own written productions. Amongst other strategies, it is important for the teacher to establish routines which will function in an organised classroom. Graves (1985:4) suggests that *“children (...) can function only in a structured room”* which *“requires an organized teacher who has set the room up to run itself. The teacher has already made a list of the things to be done to help the room function”* and the students must be aware of this from the very beginning of the school year. As the tendency to become less meticulous is likely to occur as the volume of work increases, teachers must be firm at all times, showing a solid, affectionate and enthusiastic attitude.

As work progresses, it is extremely important to develop students’ self-esteem and confidence. According to Arnold (1999:63), *“the students whose self-esteem is low take risks less frequently.”* Therefore, it is probable that these students will maintain a very low profile, creating a barrier between themselves and the teachers, and making it difficult for the latter to approach them adequately. However, Stevick, in Arnold (1999:44) defends that *“if we will only manage our teaching so as to take learner affect into account, then dead materials will come to life, and lead-headed students will produce golden achievements.”* Transformation will take place and students will blossom if teachers put affect in motion and let it flow into the students’ lives.

Arnold (1999:2) believes that *“...stimulating the different positive emotional factors, such as self-esteem, empathy or motivation, can greatly facilitate the language*

learning process.” Thus, one way of starting this movement is to believe in the students, in their every piece of work, stimulating, praising and making them feel that what they do is important. This attitude does not have immediate results, but as the school year progresses, teachers observe their students become more responsible, more engaged in the work, and eventually autonomous.

Finally, students must also witness teachers’ own writing efforts. Teachers are models for students; therefore, it is vital for them to watch how teachers write. According to Graves (1983:43), students believe that it is easy for adults to expose their ideas through writing. Because of this, he defends that *“if they see us write, they will see the middle of the process, the hidden ground – from the choice of topic to the final completion of the work.”* He believes that it is important for students *“to hear the teacher speak about the thinking that accompanies the process: topic choice, how to start the piece, lining out, looking for a better word, etc.”* In the near future, the students will be able to select the best elements for their own writing, and will slowly become more autonomous.

Many strategies may be implemented in the classroom throughout the school year, many hours may be spent conceiving the most interesting materials, but as Veronica de Andres (2000:4) states, it is certainly *“the teachers’ attitude more than their knowledge, their flexibility more than their accuracy, their open hearts more than a perfect step by step plan”* that will create happy and fully independent learners.

V – Is there room for creativity?

*“Everyone can imagine. Everyone can be creative.
It’s just a question of knowing how and letting yourself.”*⁵

Creativity can be defined as *“the capacity of creating original and unusual ideas.”*⁶ In a world where the Media easily reaches the homes of every family, providing children and teenagers with ready-made, image-animated information, much of this capacity is caused to disappear, thus giving birth to a young generation that is generally said to be unable to go beyond what they see; that is one of the reasons why students so often remain silent before a text and extremely agitated when asked to produce any piece of writing, particularly if it requires appealing to their creativity, because the imagination is not used to being stimulated.

How do teachers cope with this handicap? As much of the students’ work is written, how do they overcome the lack of interest and the absence of imagination, and accept writing as something that can be both creative and a means of conveying unusual ideas? As for everything else, motivation for writing must come from within. But how can students find this motivation inside themselves, and how can teachers motivate them for writing with creativity, as to them this seems to be something abstract?

It is said that, according to an old Hebrew tradition, when a child reads the first word of the Torah she is given a little bit of honey or a sweet; by doing this, the child will always associate studying with sweetness. It is also said that the same should happen with writing. From the very beginning, students should believe that writing can be both pleasant and a source of pleasure.⁷ Slowly, they should be led to believe that the process of writing is a world in which they have full dominion, as it is their own imagination that commands the whole process. However, there should be a beginning for the imagination to be awakened.

⁵ in Cranmer, D.(1996:61)

⁶ in *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, (1995)

⁷ in Norton, C. (2001:7)

As a starting point, Norton (2001:9) believes that, in order to be creative, students should be grouped according to age or grade, and a certain degree of culture and maturity, and teachers should choose the most adequate type of language as a way of capturing students' attention. The sessions should have the right rhythm and teachers should propose suitable exercises for each age, aiming at showing the students that if they have a piece of paper and a pencil in their hands, a story can be born.

Norton (2001:10, 15) proposes that the writing sessions should be about two hours long, seeing that in order to write a story, the students should have time. If they do, it is then a question of structuring the story into the following five sections: what, who, when, where and how.

To Norton, the two hours would be occupied with writing games of all sorts, making students gradually lose their fear of writing, and conclude that, after all, writing can be a way of having fun.

As students are not used to writing, the fear of facing a blank page is present in anyone who attempts to do it. Before starting, students should be previously taught all writing techniques, and above all they should be prepared to work hard and persevere, as talent, imagination, and some culture will be required of them.

In Norton's opinion, a major advantage that comes with the discovery of writing is the growing interest in reading. The pleasure of reading will gradually improve, and will join the pleasure of writing, of being heard, and of hearing what others have to say.

The process is very slow, but as time passes, students will become aware of the capacities they once thought did not exist, and will actually enjoy putting them to good use, instead of being manipulated at home by a small remote control.

Where classroom practice is concerned, there are authors who defend that in the light of an extensive and intensive syllabus, it is extremely hard, if not almost impossible, to practice the many text types proposed by the syllabus, and still dedicate extra time to writing creatively. As an example of this, in the article "What can Creative Writing do for Teachers?" Morrissey (2003:4) is confronted with the fact that, for example, in Switzerland, communicating through Speaking has become more important than communicating through Writing and that practising the Writing skill in the classroom is being neglected.

Moreover, his concern assumes higher proportions as he becomes more conscious of the fact that testing is done through this skill, both in the form of exercise-type sentences, and in compositions. He concludes that, perhaps, engaging in creative writing activities might be a way of putting an end to this neglect. Some teachers, though, show themselves to be reluctant. In Morrissey's opinion, there are various reasons why teachers hesitate to make room for creative writing activities within their teaching practice. One of them is that "*the schedule for most upper secondary teachers, imposed by the current syllabus, is rather tight and doesn't really allow for the luxury of playing around with language.*"

Furthermore, he states that teachers feel incapable of assessing students' work, as they are insecure about their own personal capacities for writing. They "*have doubts that they can get their students interested in writing poems, dramatic sketches or short stories.*"

Nevertheless, not all is completely lost. He points out that there are also teachers whose students respond well to creative writing activities, and the benefits they withdraw from them. Those are clearly the teachers who keep writing for pleasure, who implement creative writing in their classrooms and who attend in-service training seminars, in other words, who keep updated.

Therefore, it can be concluded that no matter how extensive the syllabus might be, much of a successful classroom practice depends on the positive attitude of the teachers.

5. Methodology

In order to put this project into practice, the teacher first gathered information about the teaching context, the target group and its social, economic and cultural background.

As a second step, the students were assessed on their ability to write text. As agreed in the English Department, all the new students were given a three-part diagnostic test. The first part was composed of a reading comprehension, the second was dedicated to assess the students' knowledge of the language, and lastly, the third part aimed at assessing writing.

Although the whole test was corrected, the first two parts were not the main concern, considering the fact that to assess the amount of text the students could write was, at this moment, much more important.

Contrary to all expectations, most students wrote a minimal amount of text, and some of them chose to hand in a blank piece of paper. That was an alarming sign, requiring an understanding of what lay behind it.

Believing there might be some kind of barrier preventing the students from writing, help was sought in *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*, (2001), Cambridge. In this document, an Overall Scale for Writing (Appendix 1) was found which helped to place the students from level A1 to B2. Instead of giving the students a mark which would reflect their level of inability, I considered that it would be much more important to place the students according to what they could already do, thus initiating a much more positive attitude towards work, and beginning to build their self-confidence.

The students were given feedback on their performance, and were eager to find out what their mark was, as they were expecting to have negative results. To their surprise, they were confronted with the opposite; instead of receiving a page full of red ink telling them what they could not yet do, (and which Cranmer (2000) and Moss (2000) believe leaves a negative impression on the students), they received the sheet of paper on which they had produced the text with a footnote saying what level they had actually achieved (Appendix 2), with the advice that they should tell their parents the name of the document this information had been taken from, as working with the

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (2001), is a novelty to most Portuguese parents and teachers. Slowly the students' self-esteem began building up as they understood that they were not necessarily at the same level, that writing is a slow process that requires a lot of hard work.

Harmer (2004:65) says that “*music can be a very effective way to stimulate a writing activity since it often provokes strong feelings and ideas.*” Consequently, after this start and as a way of slowly improving the students' writing skills and stimulating their creativity as writers, a creative writing programme making use of classical music, amongst other things, was then developed and carried out. Harmer (2004:65) goes on to say that “*just as music can provoke creativity in students – especially those who are particularly responsive to auditory stimuli – so too pictures work really well as spurs to written production.*” Thence, visuals were also used in order to stimulate the students and lead them on the road to better writing.

As a way to verify the students' improvement throughout the school year, they were assessed several times on their ability to write text in the light of the whole creative writing programme. Once again, the global scale that was taken from the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and used at the beginning to place the students, was then used to assess their improvement, and the following conclusions were reached: the barrier that was keeping the students from writing freely had slowly disappeared, and the students became engaged in any writing activity without fear. Alongside the creative writing project, the students became used to correcting their own mistakes by following correction symbols (Appendix 3). It meant hard work for the students who took the challenge, and for the teacher who had to review the same piece of writing once again, but the students concluded that their writing had, in fact, improved; slowly they grew used to writing longer and longer texts, and although these were still full of mistakes, it was important to realise that they were no longer afraid of writing, and were free to proceed to new language acquisition.

6 – Approach

The target students' writing ability

In the context of the present project, soon after meeting the students, I asked them to produce a piece of writing on a familiar subject, so that they could be assessed and placed according to the general scale for writing, of the *Common European Framework for Languages; Learning, Teaching and Assessment* (2001). The results showed that fourteen students were in level A1, meaning that they “*can write simple phrases and sentences*”, six students were in level A2, as they “*can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like ‘and’, ‘but’ and ‘because’*”. Lastly, six students were placed in level B1, showing that the student “*can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.*”

Procedure

From the results of the tests it was gathered that most of the students lacked vocabulary and basic language structures. Therefore, the first objective was to find guidance in order to show the students how to start writing, without being worried about making mistakes, and without losing their motivation in the process.

In the research, the book *Reading Like a Writer*, by Francine Prose called my attention because its structure showed how to start. Prose divides the book into several sections. Starting with a chapter dedicated to words, the others deal with sentences, paragraphs, narration, character, dialogue, details and, finally, the gesture. So, Prose's book structure was followed in order to organise the activities that would be developed with the students, and the work was organised as follows:

Phase 1 - Getting Motivated

Phase 2 - a) Writing freely and creatively
b) Developing the text

Phase 3 - Making it flow
a) Cohesion and coherence
b) Error Correction

PHASE 1

Getting motivated

Motivating teenagers is an extremely difficult task, especially at times such as the ones we are living in, when access to almost everything is at hand, and is done without leaving the comfort of their homes. The electronic age has arrived and it has taken over people's lives, competing against the good old, though time-consuming habits.

Having access to all sorts of animated visuals has brought upon teenagers a complete lack of empathy towards everything that requires some concentration and reflection. As it is much easier and more effortless to sit back and be information fed, teenagers have stopped having the capacity to imagine, to surround themselves with a whole new world within themselves, aggravated by their incapacity to produce personal ideas, as the thinking process is constantly done for them.

These factors, along with a complete lack of writing practice has led to a total absence of motivation to think, to write and to fight for what they want to achieve in life.

In the light of the above, the objective of Phase I was to lift the barriers the students might have created in their minds which were preventing them from writing any kind or any length of text. By writing down words, moving on to simple sentences, and complex sentences, which would then be joined to form paragraphs, without being worried about making mistakes, as these would be dealt with at a later stage, the students slowly became aware of their capacity to create small but meaningful texts.

What follows is an account of the activities that were given to the students in the classroom during this first phase, and the objective was to help them to lose the fear of writing and gain confidence, not taking the errors into account.

Activity One

Aim(s) – to listen carefully to a piece of music;
– to write down as many words / ideas as possible the music might suggest.

Time – 10 minutes

Materials – CD + CD player

The students were asked to listen once to the music *Minuete*, by Händel. Then, they listened again and as they did it, they wrote down single words, feelings and ideas the music might suggest.

The activity came as a surprise to the students as they had never been asked to do anything like this before, nor listened to this type of music. However, the outcome (Appendix 7) was very positive as it resulted in enough words and sentences to start a story with.

From the students' words I could gather the setting (a castle), the time (the Renaissance), a special event (a wedding), the main characters (a prince and a princess), and the secondary characters (kings and queens).

Activity Two

Aim(s) – to describe a painting by using adjectives

Time – 10 minutes

Materials – coloured reproduction of a painting by Van Gogh

The students were asked to look carefully at the reproduction of a painting - a landscape by Van Gogh (Appendix 8). They had to think of as many adjectives as possible to describe it. While they worked, they heard background music to create a good working environment. The objective of this activity was to provide the students with as many adjectives as possible in order to characterise the landscape surrounding the castle.

In the students' opinion, this was the activity they enjoyed least and the one which did not help them to write. They were unanimous in saying that the painting was not appealing. Though it was abstract, it was also colourful, and I had thought that it would be enjoyable for them to write about it.

Activity Three

Aim(s) – to observe a drawing;

– to produce simple sentences.

Time – 15 minutes

Materials - transparency of a drawing; OHP

The drawing of a girl sitting on a swing was selected (Appendix 9). As it was done by one of a former twelfth-grade finalist, I believed that it would be a good motivation for the students.

Following the structure of the book *Reading Like a Writer*, by F. Prose (2007), - *Words, Simple Sentences, Complex Sentences and Paragraphs* - the students were challenged to write simple sentences about what they were observing.

The students needed more time for this activity, not due to its difficulty, but because they were enjoying it so much they did not want it to end.

Activity Four

Aim(s) – to become acquainted with a different learning environment;
– to observe the surroundings;
– to produce complex sentences.

Time – 15 / 20 minutes

Materials – writing material, sheets of paper, and dictionaries

Whenever possible, teachers and students should make the most of the school grounds so that teaching and learning can happen in a different environment outside the classroom. In the light of this, the students were asked to gather around the school pond and, in pairs, they had to describe what they saw and heard, by writing simple sentences (Appendix 10). Each pair of students was then asked to join the sentences, forming complex sentences, and making use of the dictionaries as they felt it was needed.

When the students returned to the classroom, they joined in groups and compared the sentences, eliminating those that were repeated.

This activity met the agreement of all the students as it allowed them to merge into a different environment, making both students and the teacher feel free from the traditional way of teaching / learning.

They selected this activity as the most enjoyable and the one that helped them to write the most.

Activity Five

Aim(s) – to observe a hand painting;
– to describe the painting;
– to think of a possible use for the character.

Time – 20 minutes

Materials – hand-painted T-shirt

The students observed a hand-painting on a T-shirt which reflected the image of a fairy. (Appendix 11) Their task was to describe the painting as much as possible, and say what the purpose of this fairy could be in the lives of the main characters. In order to describe this fairy, the students could use all the words they had learnt during all previous activities.

The reaction to this painting was extremely positive, as some of the students created great empathy towards it. Some of them said that it reminded them of their childhood and felt a sense of joy just by looking at it. This activity was also selected by them as one of the most enjoyable.

After having accomplished the above-mentioned activities included in Phase I – Getting Motivated - and after observing the students' growing enthusiasm and constant demand for more time to write, it was concluded that they were ready to move on to a more demanding phase. As the barrier of fear had disappeared, they were now able to expand the story, making use of their imagination.

PHASE 2

a) Writing freely and creatively

As the students were now enthusiastic about the story they were creating and ready to move forward to more demanding activities, the objective of this phase was to allow them to interact freely with the text, providing them with the necessary material that would allow them to expand the ideas produced in Phase I.

In order to do that, I first provided them with Cranmer's (1996:63) *Licence* (Appendix 12), a document that gave the students permission to use their imagination as freely as possible, and to write anything they thought interesting so as to improve the story.

Once again, drawings, music and paintings were used to allow them to free their imagination and creativity, enabling them to create longer paragraphs and dialogues, thus conferring to the text a greater dynamics.

Activity One

Aim(s) – to create a dialogue.

Time – 20 minutes

Materials – transparency of a drawing; OHP

The students were once again provided with a drawing which was projected on the overhead projector. This drawing reflected the image of a young girl sitting on a swing and a young man standing behind her, and seeming to be talking to her (Appendix 13).

The students were asked to sit in groups of four, and to look closely at the drawing and to imagine the dialogue between the prince and the princess.

The students regarded this activity as another challenge to be met. They found the dialogue difficult to start, saying that they did not have many ideas, but as they had more time for the activity, they finally started to write and their faces reflected enjoyment.

Activity Two

Aim(s) – to listen carefully to a piece of music;
– to produce a dialogue.

Time – 45 minutes

Materials – CD; CD player

The students were asked to listen carefully to the music *Reflections of Nature – Symphony of Songbirds – “Blackbirds”* (Appendix 14). This music was chosen because of its smoothness of sound and mainly because of its background, as it reproduced the tweeting of birds. The students were asked to imagine a dialogue between the birds as they watched the couple talking.

The students’ attitudes towards this piece of writing were very interesting. Initially they were told they could only have twenty minutes to produce the dialogue, but one of the students asked if they could establish a relationship between the previous drawing and this music, to which I agreed. Therefore, this twenty-minute activity turned into a forty-five-minute session of pure writing enjoyment, as it was hard to separate them from the texts, and the pleasure they were having of imagining something that was their own creation. One could see creativity flowing.

Activity Three

Aim(s) – to observe a painting;
– to imagine what a character is writing and another one is thinking.

Time – 45 / 50 minutes

Materials – reproduction of a painting

The students were each given the reproduction of a painting by Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), (Appendix 15), showing a lady sitting at a desk, writing on a piece of paper, and behind her, a maid looking out of a window.

The students were asked to imagine what the lady was writing, who she was writing to, and what the maid might be looking at and thinking about.

This activity was different from the others in the sense that it was part of a summative test. I considered that facing this creative writing activity on a test would not only be a challenge for the students, but it would also be an opportunity to observe the students’ reactions towards it.

They had two options to choose from: Topic A – a comment on the importance of English as a worldwide means of communication; Topic B – a painting they could write about without being penalized for the mistakes, which was not the case in Topic A.

Of the twenty-eight students in the class, twenty-five chose Topic B. When asked about the reasons for this choice, the students were unanimous in saying it had to do with the fact that they knew that errors would not be penalized. This led me to the conclusion that by knowing they are going to make mistakes and also that they are going to be penalized for them, the students create a barrier which prevents them from writing freely, and this greatly reduces their creativity.

PHASE 2

b) Developing the text

In this section of Phase II, the students formed groups, and for the first time they contacted with the text they were producing. After careful selection, the text was divided into several sections – *Once upon a Time*, *Girl on a Swing*, *The Fairy*, *The Prince and The Princess on a Swing*, *The Blackbirds*, and finally *A Lady Writing and a Maid Looking out the Window* - and each group had the opportunity to choose a section to work on and expand.

Keeping in mind Prose's sentence "Read your work aloud, if you can", (2007:56), the students read the story aloud for the first time, so that they could choose the section they would enjoy working on.

Activity One

Aim(s) – to listen to the texts;
– to choose a section of the texts;
– to expand the text.

Time – 2 lessons of 90 minutes each

Materials – reproduction of a painting

The students listened to the reading of each section, and afterwards each group chose a specific section to work on. The students were told to go through each section again and to improve it by changing sentences, and adding new ones, if they wished to do so.

Some groups started writing immediately, others felt the need to think, to draw a plan, to be more careful about the next step. Therefore, these students had to extend it to another lesson, as time ran out.

During the next lesson, the students gathered in their groups once again and started working, furthering the process of selecting sentences and paragraphs they would like to expand. Once again the students were told not to worry about the errors, as these would be dealt with at a later stage, during Phase III.

Activity Two

Aim(s) – to listen to a piece of music
– to imagine a turning point in the story

Time – 60 minutes + 30 minutes for sharing

Materials – CD; CD player

The students listened to the *Sinfonia Alcina*, by Händel, in order to get the feeling of it. They had to write down words and ideas the music might suggest.

Then, they joined in groups, and used the ideas the music suggested to introduce a turning point in the story. While they worked, the music was playing in order to create a good working environment. At the end of the task, the groups shared their outcome.

During this activity, four groups worked with enthusiasm, although two students decided to do pair work, claiming that they were not having any ideas.

Seeing that the lesson was reaching the end, and that the students had finished most of the work they had been asked to do, they were aloud to leave. However, one group stayed inside the classroom until five minutes after the bell rang, writing and laughing and clearly enjoying the moment.

Bearing in mind the positive attitude of the students regarding this lesson, the conclusion was that they had reached a stage in which they were writing more freely, without hesitations, and many of them were using the dictionary as a resource, a habit they did not have at the beginning of the school year. They were undoubtedly more at ease with the words and fear seemed to have disappeared, which made it possible to move forward to Phase III. However, before this could happen, the students were reassessed again and placed according to the Overall Scale for Writing (Appendix 16), which was then compared to the first placement to verify if there had been any improvement.

PHASE 3

Making it flow

This phase was composed of two main objectives – to make the text flow by giving cohesion and coherence to it, and by correcting the errors. As the school year was fast approaching the end, and the syllabus was far from being fully completed, it became rather difficult to dedicate extra time to the project, therefore the work that was accomplished was but a small glimpse of what could have been done had there been more time.

a) Cohesion and coherence

“For writing to be truly accessible, however, it also needs to be both cohesive and coherent.”⁸

By cohesion and coherence, it is meant *“a close relationship based on grammar or meaning, between two parts of a sentence or a larger piece of writing.”* and *“a reasonable connection or relation between ideas, arguments, statements, etc.”⁹*

According to Harmer (2004:22-24), when producing any piece of writing, it is important to bear in mind certain linguistic techniques in order to ensure that the text makes sense. To achieve cohesion, the writer may use lexical repetition, words within the same lexical area, and grammatical devices so that the reader can gain full understanding of the text. There are a number of devices that help the writer to achieve both lexical and grammatical cohesion; besides the repetition of words, and lexical chains, there are also pronoun and possessive reference, article reference, tense agreement, linkers, substitution and ellipsis. These elements combined confer to the text a unique structure which enables the reader to make sense and logic of it, understanding both the writer’s purpose and line of thought. The right register is also important, as it

⁸ in Harmer, J. (2004:22)

⁹ in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995:254)

involves choosing the right topic vocabulary to suit the subject matter of the text being written.

Bearing this in mind, the students were divided into six groups and each received a piece of the story they had produced in the course of the school year. By making use of the grammar items and structures they had learnt and practised, each group was asked to read their section and introduce changes, connect sentences, give names to characters, all having in mind the improvement of the story. The groups were told not to pay attention to the errors, though, as that would be dealt with in a future session.

This part of the work was not easy for the students, as it required much more attention on their part than simply writing for joy. Now it was required of them to apply what they had learnt, and it became clear that the whole class showed great commitment and improvement.

b) Error correction

“There are a number of ways of reacting (to students’ work) but these generally fall within one of two broad categories: responding and correcting.”¹⁰

When students are writing, they expect the teacher to intervene with some kind of comment, suggestion or advice, directing them as to the best way to a successfully completed task. This intervention may come in the form of a response or a correction. Should the teacher choose to respond to the students’ work, more attention is paid to the content and design of the writing, giving place to a more private conversation between the teacher and the students, and to a greater exposure of personal feelings and beliefs.

On the other hand, there comes a time at which corrections must be made. At this point, the teacher will take issues such as syntax, concord, collocation or word-choice and correct the students’ texts. At this stage, the students’ piece of writing is marked in order to show how correct it is.

¹⁰ in Harmer, J. (2004:108)

In both cases, whether responding or correcting, the students will only improve if they use the feedback they get. But this is a choice they will have to make, as it is up to them to decide if they want to accept the teacher's suggestions and advice or not.

Throughout the school year, the students made use of symbols in order to identify the error and correct any piece of writing. As the year was coming to an end, it became impossible to apply this procedure to the story they created for more than one single ninety-minute session.

In order to gain time, and to be able to go through the whole text in class, all the errors were marked on the six pages. Then, in the classroom, the text was projected on a screen and the whole class gave its contribution by reading, identifying and correcting each error, with the guidance of the teacher.

This would certainly have had greater impact if the students had had more time. This work would have been sectioned again and, in groups, each section of the text would have been corrected separately.

7 - Reflection upon experience

a) Dealing with time

In the light of all that has been stated, experience has shown that managing time was extremely difficult, and the most important factor for the success of this Project. Having two weekly blocks of ninety minutes was not enough to develop writing, and simultaneously, develop reading, listening and particularly speaking, which has a weighting of 30% in the students' assessment.

Alongside these skills, grammar also requires attention. In the classroom, time must be found to look at the lexis and language structures that need improvement and enhancement. All this must be accomplished as the focus depends on four socio-cultural contents as vast as those proposed by the syllabus for the 10th grade students.

Having twenty-eight students who, in the beginning, barely knew how to utter a word or write a line in English, making them hand in a blank piece of paper most of the times, and adding to this, dealing with each student's idea of being totally incapable of learning the language, made the task of teaching creative writing in order to improve the writing skill as a whole, extremely difficult, if not sometimes almost impossible.

As the school year proceeded, there was always a choice to be made – teach the contents or continue teaching creative writing – as students were decidedly more enthused with the latter rather than the former. The choice fell on keeping a balanced teaching of both, hoping that creative writing would help students gain more vocabulary and structures, as well as more confidence and empathy towards the socio-cultural contents.

Although the amount of time dedicated to the Project was not ideal, the time that was effectively applied to it was “*beneficial for the students' language and writing skills*” (Harmer, 2004:130). I am of the opinion that, in order to realise a more balanced, stable and less stressful task, thus achieving more positive results, there should be, at least, three weekly ninety-minute blocks for the teaching of English.

b) Overcoming a tight school syllabus

At present, secondary schools are receiving students who reveal a much higher level of rejection of the English language, and the reasons they present are varied – they are not used to having the teachers speak English in class, they lack vocabulary, their former teachers spoke Portuguese in class, or even, they only taught grammar. As a result of this, many students reach secondary school without having passed in English during the previous five years, and they reveal very low self-esteem and a generalised negative attitude towards every activity in class.

The syllabus does not contemplate this student profile. It is very extensive and difficult to accomplish, due to the many topics and sub-topics to be taught and to the amount of grammar teachers do their utmost to revise, consolidate and, most often, teach for the first time. However, teachers do their best to reach the end as they have to give an account of what has been taught, at the end of the school year.

Adding to this, experience shows that teachers run a very tight schedule and have too many classes, each with twenty-eight, sometimes thirty students, who have different learning difficulties and needs due to lack of previously-acquired knowledge of the language.

Nevertheless, many teachers who are dedicated to the cause and to their students believe they will eventually accomplish their task, no matter how difficult or seemingly impossible it may be. However hard the syllabus may be, it is varied enough for the teacher to choose for each topic the best and the most appealing activities. Each lesson is an opportunity to be explored, as usually simple activities can be transformed into creative moments the students enjoy and the teacher leaves the room feeling fulfilled because learning did occur. It is all a question of attitude.

c) Error penalisation

Errors can have two different weights for many students. Some may consider them as a means of moving one step further in their work; others may view them as a negative aspect of learning, as something that reveals total incapacity to learn the language.

It is true that errors cannot be disregarded, and teachers and students have to deal with them, but in a way that is constructive for both parties involved. Teachers must reveal a change of attitude; rather than the immediate underlining or correction of the error, which is of no avail to the students as there is no understanding of what the error is, teachers should decide which is more important – the final product or the writing process itself. According to Graves (1985:8), *when children write, they make mistakes on the road to communicating their messages. The teacher's first response is to the meaning.*” The students’ first intention is to communicate, to respond to the questions set by the teachers, and to exteriorise feelings and opinions in relation to a given subject. That is what is most important in a first stage, to create empathy with the topic and to write down opinions and the thoughts that arise. A second stage is needed to come to terms with the language.

To Elbow (1973:6), “trying to get the beginning just right is a formula for failure.” It is rather difficult to lead students into walking with motivation down the road of good writing, and still ask them to stop every so often to clear the stones off the already hard path, these stones being the teachers’ urge for perfection. Elbow (1973:6) also states that *“the habit of compulsive, premature editing doesn’t just make writing hard. It also makes writing dead.”* Often teachers complain about their students’ meaningless writing. Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that they are insisting upon an attitude that does not make sense any longer, as students have also changed.

Experience has shown that the first contact the target students had with a simple writing task at a secondary level was through the diagnostic test, at the beginning of the school year. By giving personal opinions on their summer holidays, they also had to give a first impression of their writing ability. Most students seemed troubled by the task, as they showed that they lacked the necessary vocabulary that would allow them to write even just a few lines.

As the first activities began, the students were informed that the errors would not be penalised, and that what was really important was for them to write their ideas down without being worried about being accurate.

There were many different reactions to this method. At first, the students seemed bothered by the absence of correction. Then, they began to think that something was wrong as the teacher seemed not to care about what they were writing.

Slowly the students became aware that first they had to feel free to write as they pleased, thus letting the barrier of fear fall. Then, as they had shown a great lack of vocabulary and language structures, they had to learn in separate stages – from simple words to simple sentences; from more complex sentences to paragraphs; developing paragraphs and creating dialogues.

Finally, the students came to terms with errors. Whenever they wrote an essay, every error was given a symbol. As they knew what each symbol meant, they had to rewrite the essay, inserting the correction in the place of the error. Cranmer (2000)¹¹ and Moss (2000)¹² have reservations about this error-correction strategy, but although their opinions were taken into consideration, experience has shown that the students who did regular error-correction work through symbols were the ones whose writing improved the most. Even if at a first stage they struggled with a symbol, they did not put the work aside, they knew that they could count on the teacher to guide them through the correction.

The fact that students did not have to think about producing a perfect piece of writing right from the very beginning, not only took the writing barrier away, but also allowed them to let their imagination flow, which is something they said they did not think they were capable of doing.

Therefore, I have reached the conclusion that in spite of being important to teach students how to write as accurately as possible, should their written work present any kind of error, which will most likely happen at any time, the correction should be dealt with at a later stage. Motivating students and leading them into facing writing as a pleasurable activity is much more important and time-saving.

d) Organisation and good working atmosphere in the classroom

Teaching big classes is frequently a great task but it can present teachers with interesting results. The target group was at a first glance a great challenge, due to its size. During the first weeks, the students revealed varied learning rhythms. As some

¹¹ in Cranmer, D. (2000:1)

¹² in Moss, H. (2000:2)

came from Georgia, Moldavia, Russia and South Korea, they showed different, albeit methodical working habits.

When the Project was introduced, multiple reactions echoed in the classroom, many of which were of discontentment as the students revealed fear due to the incapacity of expressing themselves in English. Many revealed that writing was something they were not accustomed to doing, and something they did not enjoy doing at all as they lacked vocabulary and most language structures. This constituted an opportunity to overcome a barrier, to work on personal improvement as there was the need to look for different strategies, the first of which was to detect the amount of text the students were effectively capable of writing, perceive their personal learning rhythms, and then work on individual self-esteem by praising each student and the work produced every time a line or a small paragraph was written; in other words, the answer was believing in what they could do, no matter how small or uninteresting it might have looked.

Having a demanding syllabus to teach, as was previously mentioned, the need to adapt it to the students' characteristics arose, along with careful management of the Writing Project, which had to be inserted in the plan. As time passed, and as the students engaged in the activities, being praised and rewarded for their work, the greatest reward being the absence of error penalisation, their reactions slowly began to change. As they gained more confidence, they opened up to each other, to their peers in other classes, and to their teachers.

In spite of working with the class as a whole, and giving individual attention to each student, two of them revealed different behaviours towards the work: one gave up the course and changed the field of studies, although she was insistently asked to attend the lessons as she would most certainly improve. Another one revealed writer's block at the end of the school year, which prevented her from writing temporarily. However, no matter how difficult it was for her, she persevered and concluded the 10th grade.

Writing with the students, sharing personal texts which were then published in the school newspaper was a wonderful and motivating experience, as it created empathy and allowed great reflecting and sharing moments.

Finally, some things were not possible to put into practice due to school

organisation. Being a secondary school in which the classes move from one classroom to another, it was impossible to organise a room in which the students would have all the writing material available, with computers and printers to be used. It was also difficult to keep an organised schedule, with a specific day for writing, as this Project seemed to take time off from teaching the rest of the contents of the syllabus. But the strategies that were put into practice, along with the activities that were proposed did, indeed, change the students' attitude towards Writing.

e) Is there room for creativity?

Experience has shown that the target group, whose students were of the same age group, had little or no experience of writing, and most of them revealed an immense difficulty in the exposure of their ideas. Firstly, the question that arose was how the students would react to the activities they were about to be exposed to; secondly, if they would be sufficiently motivated to tear down the mental barrier that was preventing them from writing, thus producing creative ideas.

Although Graves defends that students should have writing sessions four days a week, it was not possible to have creative writing lessons so frequently. However, when these lessons did occur, the students reacted positively to the piece of music they had to listen to or to the painting they had to describe, knowing that what was required of them was the exposure of their ideas, their feelings and emotions, without being worried about perfection.

Moreover, it became clear that the more the students became used to writing, appealing to their imagination, the more they were concluding that, after all, writing can be both a way of having fun, and a source of pleasure. Engaging in creative writing activities may be, after all, a way of putting an end to the supremacy Speaking is having over Writing.

As time passed, the activities became fewer, but the time set for each activity needed to be extended, as the students started improving the texts and sharing them by reading them aloud, and thrilled with every moment of the experience.

The students worked very hard. When in difficulties, they persevered, helped each other, and their growing enthusiasm passed from one to another, turning the writing sessions into the best moments of the English lessons, and eventually motivating the teacher into producing a few reflections.

8 - Final Reflection

The benefits drawn from this experience were immense. In the attempt to show that there is room for creative writing in the classroom, and that it does, in fact, help the students' writing in general to become more fluent, as it can be confirmed in other pieces of writing included in this project (Appendix 17), experience has shown that, in spite of all limitations, the activities carried out in class throughout the three phases helped the students to achieve a more positive attitude towards the language, as they felt they were overcoming their difficulties. As they slowly learnt to follow the steps – words, simple sentences, complex sentences, paragraphs and dialogues – fear disappeared and writing improved. By being allowed to write freely, making use of their imagination, and not being penalised for their errors, the students lifted up the psychological barrier that in the beginning was preventing them from writing, and became emotionally free to write other text types.

The students' writing ability was reassessed at the beginning of the new school year, and they were placed again according to the previously-mentioned Overall Scale for Writing. Comparing these results with the last assessment of the previous school year, (Appendices 18 and 19) it was noticed that most students had declined in quality, perhaps because the school year had ended, and the project had stopped, and the students had stopped being exposed to the language. Regarding the students whose writing samples are included, results show great variation, particularly where one of the students is concerned (Appendix 20).

In order to strengthen the veracity of the findings, during the first term of the new school year, the syllabus began to be taught and the creative writing programme was interrupted on purpose. The students began to reveal anxiety and fear as everything was new once again and there seemed to be no possible escape. They began asking when they could work on the story again. Bearing these reactions in mind, it was concluded that by not engaging in that pleasurable, fun-filled writing activity, that was also free from error penalisation, some of the students whose writing had improved, took a major step back. One of them, who was slowly overcoming major difficulties, simply refused to write, showing total incapacity, proving that the practice of creative writing in the classroom was helping the student to gain more vocabulary and to feel that it was

possible to achieve positive results. In general, it did help the students to improve their vocabulary and language structures, but mainly it helped them to gain more self-confidence and to regard writing as a pleasurable activity.

Referring to her project, Veronica de Andres (2000:4) defends that “*the teachers’ attitude more than their knowledge, their flexibility more than their accuracy, their open hearts more than a perfect step by step plan made the project work so well.*” This experience proved itself to be extremely enriching, not only because a new insight of how to teach the Writing Skill through Creativity was gained, but also because it helped me as a teacher to become more flexible and open-hearted towards errors the students often make, and to change certain lifelong attitudes and beliefs in my personal teaching practice.

As for the students, the will to learn, the enthusiasm and the commitment they showed towards this Writing Project did not totally disappear, as they were promised they would soon return to the five-page story they produced (Appendix 21). While waiting, they started creating drawings to illustrate the story (Appendix 22), which will aim in the future at being published. This is their cherished dream. Therefore, it is my firm belief that they were the engine that *made the project work so well.*” (Andres, 2000:4)

Appendix 1

Common Reference Levels: global scale

C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of Proficient meaning even in more complex situations.
C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and independent disadvantages of various options.
B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate basic need.
A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

in *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment*, Cambridge, 2000.

Appendix 2

OVERALL WRITTEN PRODUCTION – 10º N

Students' Numbers	C2
	<i>Can write clear, smoothly flowing, complex texts in an appropriate and effective style and a logical structure which helps the reader to find significant points.</i>
	C1
	<i>Can write clear, well-structured texts of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.</i>
	B2
	<i>Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources.</i>
	B1
Nº 11 Nº 16 Nº 19 Nº 20 Nº 21 Nº 22	<i>Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.</i>
	A2
Nº 5 Nº 9 Nº 10 Nº 15 Nº 25 Nº 26	<i>Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'.</i>
	A1
Nº 1 Nº 2 Nº 4 Nº 6 Nº 7 Nº 8 Nº 12 Nº 13 Nº 14 Nº 17 Nº 18 Nº 23 Nº 24 Nº 27	<i>Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.</i>

D- In 50 to 60 words write about your holiday experiences. Don't forget to mention who you went with; where you went to; what type of activities you did; how you felt.

Student n° 1

D- In 50 to 60 words write about your holiday experiences. Don't forget to mention who you went with; where you went to; what type of activities you did; how you felt.

Student n° 7

In my holidays, I went to the pool, beach of my cousins
I went travel this children

Student n° 14

Every summer, I usually go to the south of Spain with my parents, my sister and my grandfathers.

In ~~to~~^{this} holidays I went to the beach, played mini-golf gave many walks on my ~~to~~ bike and I listened music.

I felt happy because I love to go to Spain and sad because I don't have much friends there.

Student nº 16

My holiday's was wonderful. I went to the beach with my family and friends. Water was great and the sun shining. I was to the park too. We did pickenick there with my friends and a lot of fun. I and my friends went to the cinema to watch films. My best friend spent one week in my house and we did many things and enjoyed very much. These holidays were the best in my life.

Student nº 19

Appendix 3

Symbols

Sp	– Spelling
Wm	– Word Missing
Ww	– Wrong Word
/	– Paragraph Change
Rs	– Revise Structure
WT	– Wrong Tense
Ag	– Agreement

Appendix 4

Mafra and the National Palace



The surrounding gardens



The school



Nature inside the school



Leisure at school



The Library and Self-Access Centre



The teachers' room and surrounding areas



The hall and the exhibition room



The computer classrooms



Other classrooms

Arts



Biology



Chemistry

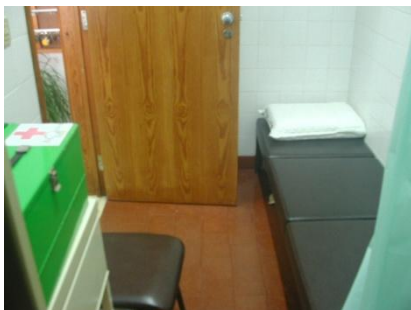


The canteen and students' room



Other facilities

The first-aid room



The helpers' rest room



The teacher-parent meeting room



The class-teachers' room



Sports Facilities

The athletics field



The volleyball field



The Projects

Tasquinhas Saloias, the helpers' project



Biology

The pond



Geography

The Weather Station



The radio and newspaper projects



The *Mafra e Linhas de Torres* Project



A school that promotes good learning and teaching in a healthy environment.

THE END!

Appendix 5

The new school project



The new school – the project becoming a reality

The main entrance



Where once there were trees, the school is now prepared to meet future needs.



The entrance hall



Another view



The main access to the classrooms



The new library and self-access centre – a view



The new library and self-access centre – another view



The new and fully-equipped sports facilities



**The access to the new
Biology and Chemistry laboratories**



The laboratories – a view



Another access to the classrooms



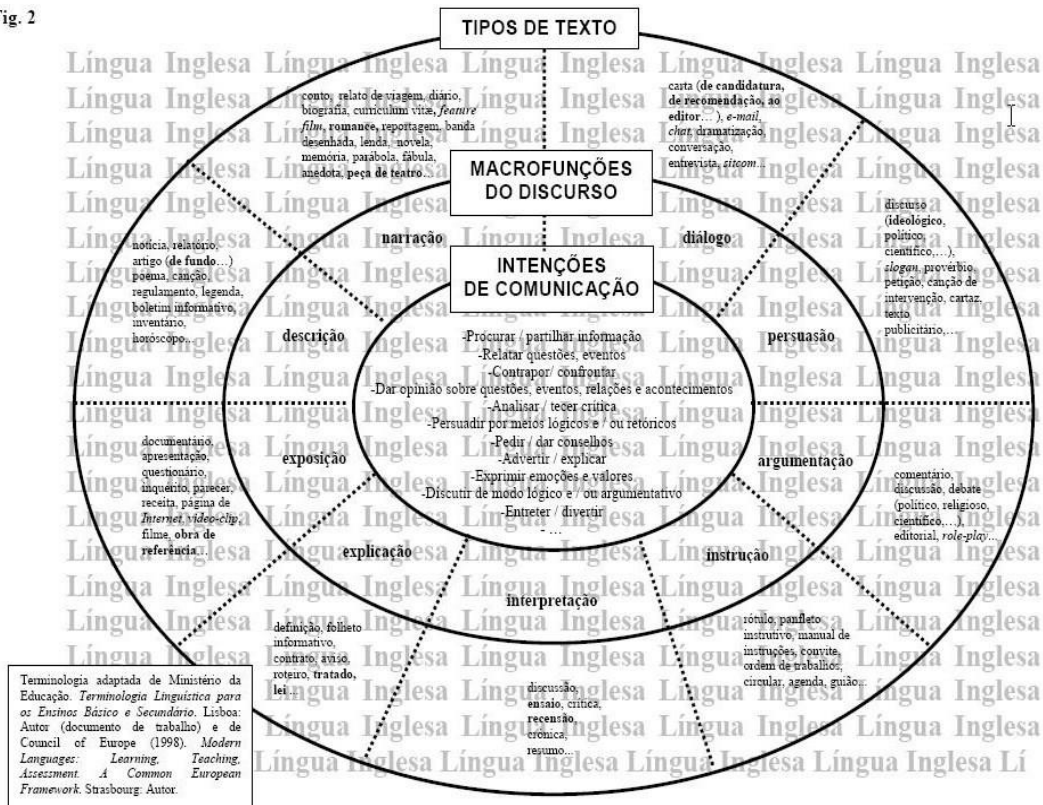
One of the classrooms



A more modern teaching and learning environment, ready to face new challenges!

Appendix 6

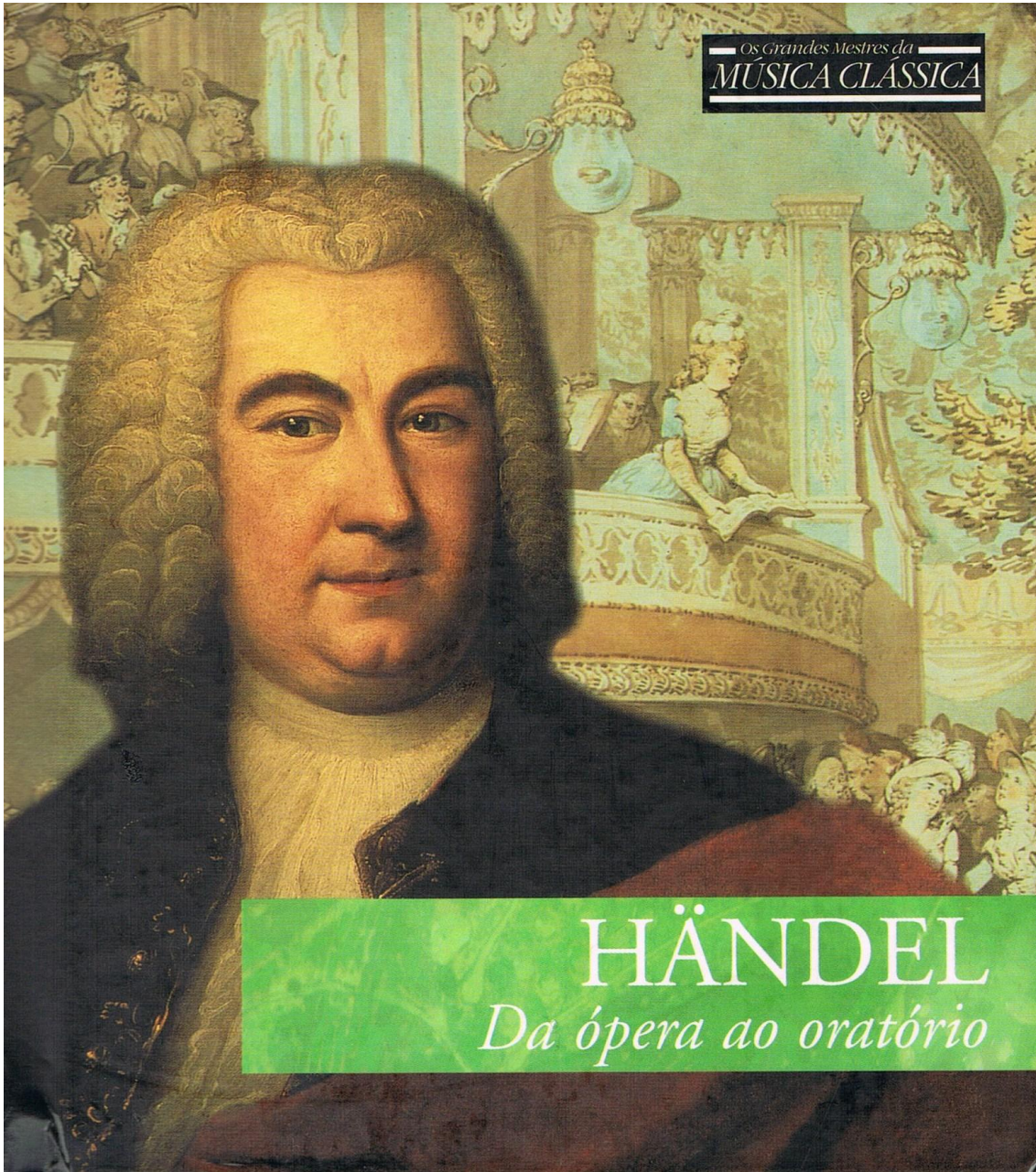
Fig. 2



Terminologia adaptada de Ministério da Educação. *Terminologia Linguística para os Ensinos Básico e Secundário*. Lisboa: Autor (documento de trabalho) e de Council of Europe (1998). *Modern Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. A Common European Framework*. Strasbourg: Autor.

in *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*, (2001), Cambridge.

Appendix 7



“Minuete”, in *Händel, Da Ópera ao Oratório*, Track 20.

Tranquility

kings

two persons

dancing

ball

rich

waltz

Student n° 1

Love

Boyfriend and girlfriend are dancing.

The people in concert.

Happy

Opera-house.

Student n° 7

good music

I feel in a ball

Remember un costume

& I remember Remember the Queens, kings, princesses and
prince

Student n° 14

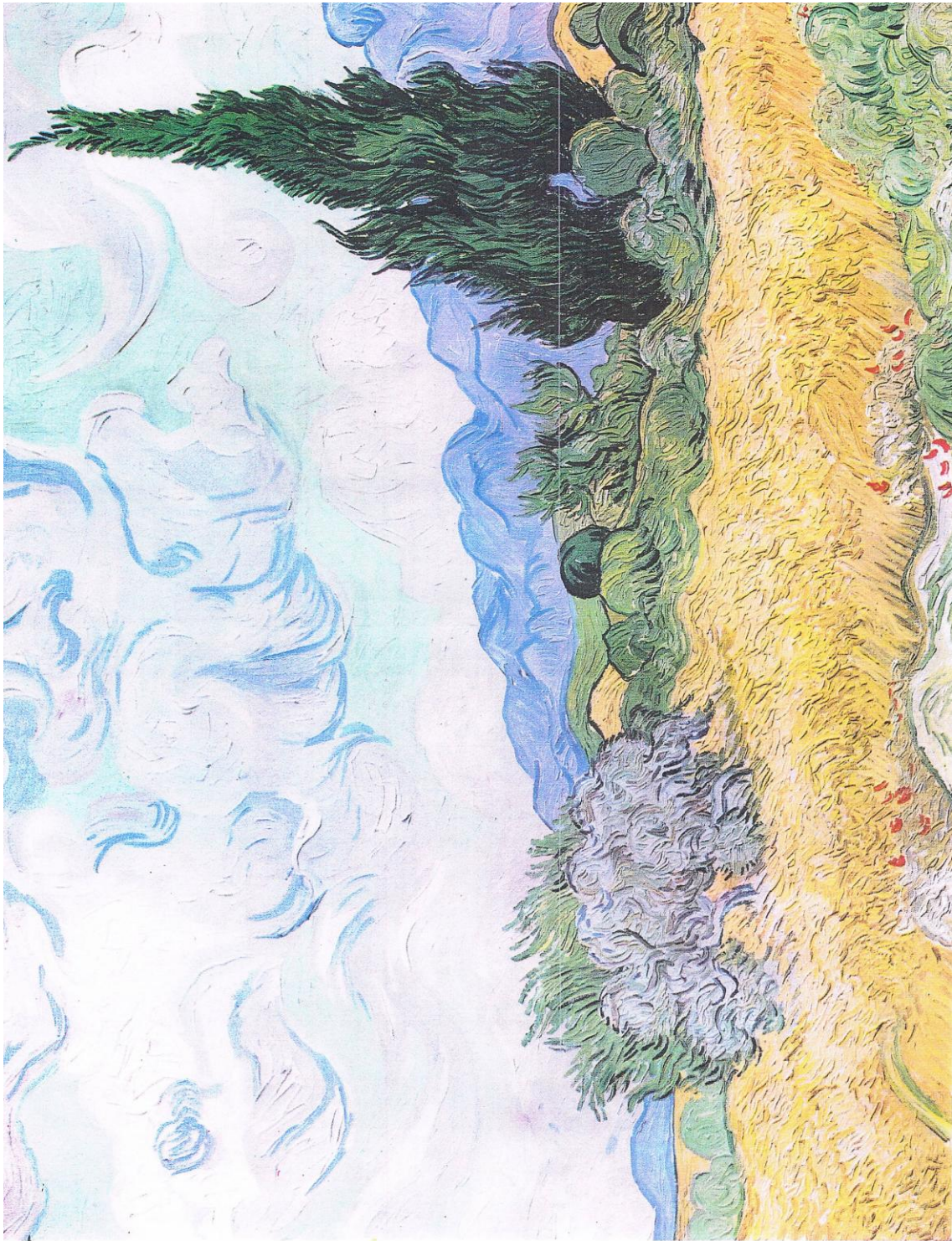
This music make me ~~feel~~ ~~imagine~~ imagine a
happy place, with ~~me~~ a harmonious place
with trees and animal dancing happily.
It also make me think about
the ~~high~~ ~~high~~ high society of the
times of the Renaissance ✓

Student n° 16

Ball, ball, waltz, dinner, dance, par, ~~ecquestre~~
orchestra, music,

Student n° 19

Appendix 8



126. VINCENT VAN GOGH. *Seara de trigo com ciprestes*. 1889. 0,72 × 0,91 m. The National Gallery, Londres
(Reproduzido com autorização dos Administradores)

Appendix 9



Work done by a former 12th grade student

Princess wait the prince
Princess look the kingdom

Student n° 1

The girl listening to music.
The picture has the gramophone.
The girl is very beautiful.
The castle is magnificent.
In the picture there is the boat with 2 person.
The picture is transmit calm.

Student n° 7

the Princess & seen view
In this view exists un castelle
the view the princess seen un River
In the River is the boat ✓
Inside the boat is the Queen. ✓

Student n° 14

This picture suggests a woman looking
to a castle.
She is sitting in a swing.

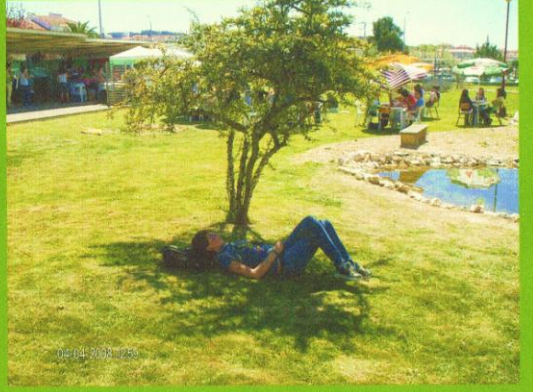
In the lake a man is walking
with a woman in a boat.

Student n° 16

There is a girl. She is sitting on the dangle.
There are the boy and the girl. They are on the boat.
There is a palace. The boat is in the ^{river} ~~sea~~. There
is the wood. There is a mountain too. The girl has
very beautiful dress. Her hair is very long. The
picture is wonderful.

Student n° 19

Appendix 10



“The pond,” at Escola Secundária José Saramago

we feel the sun in our body!
we listening the water we feel tranquility
we can see the fish and

Student n° 1

The lake has fish, frogs and dragonflies.
He is natural because he has very sorts different.
The lake transmit peace because he is calm.

Student n° 7

The lake is very beautiful but is pity
because it has ~~a~~ so many rubbish.

⊗ In the lake I can see fishes, frogs,
~~stone~~ stone.

~~around the lake~~

Around the lake it has grass, this
grass is being watered.

Student n° 14

I listen the sound
of the cars who are
passing near the school.
I can listen an irrigation
of water near a lake

I can see a lake with
red fish, can see the
school, my partners, and
the meteorologic station

Student nº 16

This place is very interesting and
very beautiful. There is lake with
fishes ~~in it~~ and frogs in it. The
fishes are very little and oranges.
There are different plants that
are wonderful. We can feel
breeze of the wind that is very
good. There are pupils which are
going to the lessons, and there
are pupils who are doing the
group work for the english. There
are not clouds the sun is
shining and its very hot. In front
of us are blue houses and car
parking. ~~there are~~ ~~there are~~
there are birds that are drink
water from the lake. This
landscape which were watching
is wonderful.

Student nº 19

Appendix 11



“The Fairy,” hand-painted on a T-Shirt

I look fairy ^{long} dress the colour is pink.

Fairy have wings white and pink.

Fairy pass tranquility and liberty.

she is to comb long hair.

Student n° 1

The picture, for me, is the fairy tale because the fairy is enchantress. The fairy has a long dress, a big wings and she is surround the ~~stars~~ brilliant stars.

She has ~~a~~ a ~~the~~ tranquility and ~~the~~ magic because she is one fairy marvelous. ✓

Student n° 7

when I seen this picture I feel me in the magic world, ~~what~~ were I am a fairy.

I have a most beautiful wings and I can fly for everybbody magic word.

In the magic world existe, creatures of trees, lovely gnomes, the most beautiful beards and many colors flowers.

Student n° 14

This t-shirt contains an image of a girl with wings. A ~~fairy~~ kind of a fairy is dressed in a pink dress. She also has long brown hair.

Student n° 16

There is a doll. She has a long pink dress; that is very beautiful. She has a long hair with two flowers. The doll is very nice. The doll has ~~the~~ pink wings with brilliant and she is ~~very~~ like fairy. She transmit calm, beauty and other things. When we see this picture we become happy. I liked picture very much.

Student n° 19

Appendix 12

I hereby give myself

*permission to say silly and bizarre things,
to write mad, crazy things,
to be totally and completely daft ...
and to enjoy every minute of it.*

Signed _____

Date _____



Appendix 13



Work done by a former 12th grade student.

Appendix 14



“Symphony of Blackbirds” in *Reflections of Nature*, Track 3

Music with birds in the background

The birds are looking the young prince closing to the young princess.

Bird 1 - Ah! They are in love

Bird 2 - Oh! Yeah, they are

Bird 3 - Yax! It's disgusting

Bird 1 - No, it's so beautiful...

Bird 3 - Love don't exist

Bird 2 - No, love exist

Bird 1 - Yes, look at them! They are in love

Bird 2 - If love don't exist how they can be like that?

Bird 3 - They are pretending

Bird 1 - Shut up! You're lion. You don't know what is love

Bird 2 - You're right

Bird 3 - So do you know what is love?

Bird 2 - Of course, love is feeling, magnific, romantic and wonderful.

Bird 1 - Chhh! Piu!

Bird 2 - Look at that! They're kissing.....

Bird 1 - Oh, so romantic couple

Bird 3 - It's still disgusting. I'm leaving!

Bird 3 leave but 1 and 2 still are looking them.

- Oh, what a beautiful love,

- Yes, but it's a shame that a love is forbidden

- But they are struggling to keep the spark of their love a life

- But if the love that they feel for each other is not strong enough?

- I'm sure that they will do everything to be together.

The birds are witness the bloom is love of the couple. The place where the couple like to be is nature because the nature agreeable, harmonious and the birds singing, change affection between like the couple.

The couple of birds were watching Ariana and her sweetheart and remember how they meet and fall in

love.

- Sweetie, look the wonderful daisy that he gave her, you did the main thing when we met.

- I remember this day as if was today. You was sitting in that tree and you was beautiful and marawillose.

- I miss that day so much, the best day of my life. I remember when you sit in my right and gave me a daisy. When I saw you I felt in love with you.

- And when we danced together in that ball. Doq you remember?

- Of course, I never forget that day. And in the midnight you took me to tha lake and ask me to marriage you.

- How want that time get back.

- Look how they are kissing with love. Do you think he will take her to the lake like you did?

Music with birds in the background

The birds are witness the bloom is love of the couple.

The place where the couple like to be is nature because the nature agreeable, harmonious and the birds singing, change affection between like the couple.

The couple of birds were watching Ariana and her sweetheart and remember how they met and fall in love.

- Sweetie, look the wonderful daisy that he gave her, you did the main thing when we met.

- I remember this day as if was today. You was sitting in that tree and you was beautiful and marvelous.

- I miss that day so much, the best day of my life. I remember when you sit in my right and gave me a daisy. When I saw you felt in love with you

- And when we danced together in that ball. Do you remember?

- Of course, I never forget that day. And in the midnight you took me to lake and ask me to marriage you.

- How want that time get back.

- Look how they are kissing with love. Do you think he will take her to the lake like you did?

Bird 2 - I don't know, wait to see

Bird 1 - oh, shut up! They are talking. Let's hear.

Prince - I want to be with you. Forever

Princess - Me too, but you know we are going to have problems.

Prince - Do you think your parents will not accept me because I am poor.

Princess - It will be complicate.

Prince - Our love will surpass every obstacles. For you I will do everything.

Princess - In first place. you have to meet my parents.

Prince - Yes, of course, But how?

Princess - You can come to the ball with me today.

Prince - Are you able to do it for us?

Princess - For you I do everything. Now I have to go. I will wait for you this night. I hope you will come.

Prince - See you later my little guide star.

Bird 1 - Do you want to go to the ball again?

Bird 2 - I love it.

Appendix 15



Painting by Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675)

2 ~~Empy~~ ^{Lady} ~~is~~ is writing letter for husband.
Husband is away, she write all weekly for he
she ~~is~~ ~~very~~ have ~~very~~ very homesickness and alone think
the day ~~is~~ look he.
~~For~~ ~~For~~ ~~For~~ while she write, friend is looking street
and imagine appearing that ~~empy~~ ^{Lady} ~~domestic~~, ~~because~~ ~~an~~ is away husband.
~~Empy~~ ^{Lady} ~~domestic~~ is writing letter with very sadness, telling
with love he

Student n° 1

Activity C

2 - In this picture the lady is writing one letter about your ~~family~~ life. She
is very happy because she has one garden very beautiful. She writing to
her father that live in ~~Portugal~~ Portugal. She has a big house and she
has very maids, but she love one maid, her name is Susanna. Susanna
is very ~~and~~ calm and she is ~~looking~~ looking for ~~the~~ window the garden.
The lady has a big painting and she is rich.
The maid has a ~~the~~ long dress and the lady has a beautiful dress ~~and~~
long ~~and~~
The garden has a lot of flowers and a big lake.
The lake has a diverse types the fishes.
The lady and maid ~~are~~ are feels very happy because they are bestfriends

Student n° 7

Activity C

2) After the princess ~~to~~ to talk the ^{Prince} ~~boy~~ she decide written one letter.
In this letter she said ~~to~~ ~~if~~ who need the seen her again because she
discover their father are rival ~~family~~ (enimy).
She asked to the servant for given the letter to the prince.
When she written the letter the servant look for the ~~in~~ ~~embar~~
window and seen the castle of the prince and ask the princess
what ~~is~~ she seen in the prince? and she answer: ~~the~~ ~~love~~ the love.
The servant went deliver the letter

Student n° 14

() ~~The last last~~ is writing about Sulqueria was writing carefully and very mad about the inside. She ~~couldn't~~ was writing with very anger repeating all in her head ~~but~~ and inside she was laughing ~~to~~ to ~~see~~ if anything was sounding good. Two hours ago she was, in her opinion the most happy girl in the world but now she was ~~capable~~ capable of breaking the world in two. She was writing to her ~~boyfriend~~ father to ~~say~~ say that she couldn't marry with Juvenal. ~~Her~~ Zeis maid, Arminda was watching the garden for no reason while she was thinking about life. Sour Juvenal. This time he made a stupidity. For two hours he made Sulqueria wait and temperamental now she was Juvenal was in a trouble. Arminda left a smile on her lips when she saw Juvenal arriving ~~with~~ with a bouquet of a flower. At the moment she laugh Sulqueria stop writing the letter.

Student n° 16

Activity C

③ The beautiful princess Ariana is in her room. She is writing a letter for her prince. And she is very sad because she can't go to the baile with her lovely prince. Her father don't want ~~to~~ his daughter with that prince because he find for her ~~the~~ perfect husband. She said to her father that she loves Federico but he don't want to hear. So she decides to run away with Federico and writes him a letter. She is sure that she will be happy with her prince that she loves so much. The maid who with her is looking to the ~~use~~

window and thinking how wonderful is love and how much ~~she~~ Ariana loves Federico. She is looking to the beautiful garden and remembers ~~to~~ who she was in love with her prince. And her father ~~didn't~~ didn't want him too and she wants to run away with her prince but when they decided to run away the prince died. She was very sad and didn't ~~to~~ want to talk with anyone but she discovered that she was pregnant. When her son borned she was very happy and gave the name like his father Maximiliano. Now when she looks for Ariana she remember her and she wants that Ariana and her prince be very happy because love is invincible. →

Student n° 19

Appendix 16

OVERALL WRITTEN PRODUCTION – 10º N

3rd Term

Students' Numbers	C2
	<i>Can write clear, smoothly flowing, complex texts in an appropriate and effective style and a logical structure which helps the reader to find significant points.</i>
	C1
	<i>Can write clear, well-structured texts of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.</i>
	B2
Nº 16 Nº 19 Nº 20 Nº 21 Nº 22	<i>Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources.</i>
	B1
Nº 5 Nº 9 Nº 10 Nº 11 Nº 14 Nº 25	<i>Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.</i>
	A2
Nº 1 Nº 2 Nº 3 Nº 7 Nº 8 Nº 12 Nº 13 Nº 15 Nº 17 Nº 18 Nº 23 Nº 24 Nº 27 Nº 26	<i>Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'.</i>
	A1
Nº 4 Nº 6 Nº 28	<i>Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.</i>

Appendix 17

I watching TV in media two hours for day, when I am holiday watching tv in media four hours, when I haven't nothing for do or when there is something I like, for exemple one filme or one serie. TO toest subject in TV very interesting, I like watch ^{some} comments. But I don't like to spend my time watching TV, isn't addicted in TV, favourite Internet because through Internet I can talking my friends and research about everything.

Student n° 1

How much time do I spend watching TV?

I don't spend much time watching TV. I have a TV in my bedroom but it usually is switched off.

I don't waste my time to watching TV because I think that in the daytime have a lot of much things for I do.

In TV I see the documentarays and News because it is a programme very important for the life. It is very important because we looking the other people think and knows the news in world.

My mother like see the soap operas and my father like the football but they see more in the weekend.

I prefer to do things usefue then watch TV.

I watching TV when I don't have things to do.

Student n° 7

I spend more or less four hours per day watching tv but in the weekend I stay all day.

throughout a week I see tv on night in the company of my parents and my sister.

On the weekend I stay all day because I don't have nothing to do. In this time I see movies, programmes and cartoons.

On the week when I'm Home the tv stay connected but I don't see it's one way to not feel alone.

All nights I see series on rtp2 and sic. My favorite series are bones, Criminal minds, Fringe, Grey Anatomy and Supernatural.

Student nº 14

I ~~say~~ agree with the sentence because if we choose a wrong life-style like smoking, drinking alcohol or eating fast food often could be prejudicial by health.

But in the lifestyles there's something I don't agree. We can ~~for~~ like healthy life without being ~~a~~ vegetarian. If we eat in balance way we can have a very healthy life. For example if we only go ~~to~~ to ~~fast~~ fast food restaurants one or two times per month we can have a healthy life. ~~The only thing~~ But we have to eat ~~the~~ vegetables, fruits, fish, ~~meat~~ meat, milk and his derivatives in ~~balanced~~ equal proportions. We also have to do sports and avoid ~~alcohol~~ alcohol, ~~and~~ ~~tobacco~~ tobacco and drugs.

~~A~~ ~~lot~~ people have different lifestyles in meals or on it's way to be. There are many lifestyles like vegetarians, vegans, ~~and~~ raw ~~for~~ foodism, hippies, santifary, punk etc.

Some people have lifestyles because they don't want to be normal or because they have reasons for it.

An example of that is the ~~vegetarians~~ ^{vegans} that ~~that~~ ~~depend~~ depend they don't eat meat or other animal products because they are making animals suffer.

It all depends on ~~what~~ happiness. If people are happy with the lifestyle they have ~~to~~ they can ~~keep~~ are making the right choice, ~~but~~ only if ~~they~~ don't ~~cause~~ ~~harm~~ hurt our body and organism.

Student nº 16

Activity C

① - People has^{ve} different lifestyles and some of them are not healthy. For having a healthy life we ~~know~~ should have healthy lifestyle. We should ~~have~~ be careful with our alimentation. ~~We~~ Eating vegetables, fruits is very healthy for our body. There are people that eats many fast-food. It's horrible! It's provoke many illness and we ~~be~~ become very fat. There are vegetarians that don't eat meat, there are people that eat only raw food and they are healthy. They chose this lifestyles ~~because~~ because they believe that it's good for them and their health and they feel good with these choses. They worry about their health. But a healthy life don't depends only ~~on~~ of our alimentation. We have to sleep good like 8-9 hours. If we sleep good we are more concentrate with good humor and feel well. We shouldn't smoke because it's horrible for our health. And the worst is that ~~it~~ it is

addictive. Drinking ~~alcohol~~ ~~alcohol~~ alcohol is bad too. ~~For~~ For having a healthy lifestyle we should have care with our alimentation, doing many exercise which is very good, and don't smoke and drink alcohol. ~~It's~~ It's very little things but they do a big difference. ~~We~~ we should worry with our health and body because they are very important. People who chose ~~different~~ be vegan or eat raw food are not stupid, ~~they~~ they are very intelligent because they know what is good for them. We should ~~do~~ to do the same. It's depends for us.

Student n° 19

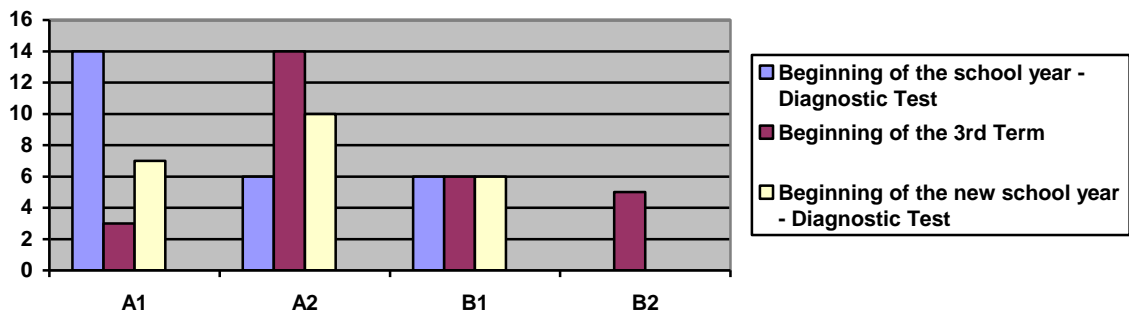
Appendix 18

OVERALL WRITTEN PRODUCTION – 11º M

Students' Numbers	C2
	<i>Can write clear, smoothly flowing, complex texts in an appropriate and effective style and a logical structure which helps the reader to find significant points.</i>
	C1
	<i>Can write clear, well-structured texts of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.</i>
	B2
	<i>Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources.</i>
	B1
Nº 9 Nº 16 Nº 19 Nº 21 Nº 22 Nº 25	<i>Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.</i>
	A2
Nº 5 Nº 7 Nº 11* Nº 13 Nº 14 Nº 15 Nº 18 Nº 20* Nº 26 Nº 27	<i>Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'.</i>
	A1
Nº 1 Nº 2 Nº 6 Nº 12 Nº 17 Nº 23 Nº 24	<i>Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.</i>
<i>* These students have come down from level B1 to A2.</i>	

Appendix 19

Table 1 – Target Students’ General Writing Assessment



At the beginning of the school year, fourteen students were in level A1, except for six who were placed in A2, and for six students whose level of English was quite good, allowing them to be placed in level B1.

At the beginning of the third term, and after the creative writing activities were implemented, the students were assessed once again and the outcome was very satisfactory: the number of students in level A1 had decreased, and the majority was now in level A2; six students remained in level B1 and five had reached level B2.

The school year ended, the students lost contact with the practice of the language, and the teacher deliberately chose to interrupt the Project during the first term, in order to decide if practising Creative Writing in class was, in fact, helping to improve the students’ writing in general. The results prove this to be true: the number of students in level A1 increased, as well as in levels A2 and B1, thus showing that most of them had receded.

Appendix 20

Table 2 – Students whose writing samples are included.

1st Assessment Diagnostic Test	2nd Assessment Beginning of 3rd Term	3rd Assessment Beginning of the new school year
C2 -	C2 -	C2 -
C1 -	C1 -	C1 -
B2 -	B2 – N° 16 N° 19	B2 -
B1 – N° 16 N° 19	B1 – N° 14	B1 – N° 16 N° 19
A2 -	A2 – N° 1 N° 7	A2 – N° 7 N° 14
A1 – N° 1 N° 7 N° 14	A1 -	A1 – N° 1

The students whose writing examples are included in the Project also show variation in their results. And they are as follows:

- student n°1 shows fluctuation between level A1 and A2, coming down to A1 again.

- student n° 7 shows some improvement, going from A1 to A2 and remaining there for the remainder of the year and the beginning of the following school year.

- students n° 16 and n° 19 do not show surprising results, fluctuating between levels B1 and B2, although some decrease in the quality of their writing was found, bringing them down to level B1 again.

- Finally, the student who registered both the best improvement and also the greatest decrease in quality was n° 14, who stepped from level A1 to B1, coming down to level A2 again.

Appendix 21

Aidan and the Princess

Once upon a time in a far, far away place, lived a girl, who was very beautiful and very special because she was a princess, but unfortunately she lived a forbidden love. Her father didn't want her to marry this boy, because he was poor.

One day, they set a date in their secret place. In this place, the landscape was magnificent and there was a swing in it. The princess sat on the swing and she waited for her love.

As soon as the boy arrived, they started to speak:

- Oh my love, I love you so much, I want to be with you forever...
- I love you too, but my father can't find out about our love.

They hugged each other and they stayed there observing the landscape.

This secret place was harmonious and it was surrounded by trees and beautiful flowers.

She stood there watching her love. She loved this place. She loved this boy. She wanted to be his wife. But their love was forbidden.

This place was every girl's dream. For the princess, being here was a way to avoid reality: a girl walking around the castle and listening to music. She closed her eyes and thought about her life as a princess. She saw a beautiful girl on top of a cliff wishing she was deep into the sea and having this handsome boy inside a boat, keeping her company.

The boy was lying there looking at the cliffs. He loved them, they were his homeland and nothing could beat the beauty of them. While away in his thoughts, he saw someone very beautiful, like nobody had seen before. It was a dream; someone was up there waiting for him. He suddenly realised that she was what he wanted, someone to love and who respected him for what he was, a poor boy. He wanted love and magic in his marriage, but she represented duty and obligation.

Aidan decided to return to land to try to find the girl of the cliff and talk to her. He knew that the girl of the cliff was the evil Eva. To see her, Aidan would return.

They had met on a field full of flowers where there was nobody else, only them. They looked up at each other and a look was enough to realize that it was love. Then, Aidan kissed her and had believed that she was the girl of his life.

It was once a story of love and magic between a boy and a peasant girl.

Aidan looked again at the princess. She was wearing a fairy-pink long dress, filled with very bright stars. Fairies have white and pink wings. Fairies transmit peace, tranquillity and freedom. His princess looked like a fairy, with her beautiful loose brown hair, reminding him of a pair of wings waving in the air.

Aidan felt as if he was in a magic world and that she was his fairy. He wished that they could both fly to many places in this magic world where tree creatures existed, lovely gnomes with the most beautiful beards and many coloured flowers.

His fairy came from the world of magic, the world of fairies, which is very different from reality. His fairy reminded him of his childhood, when imagination knew no limits.

As time went by, he noticed that shiny stars were glowing in the sky, as if the beauty of the pink fairy made them shine even more.

Her dress was so beautiful, so wonderful and shining so much that if she went to the ball, everybody would stop just to watch her dance in that dress. Her beauty, though, did not come from outside, the most important beauty was inside.

When he looked at her, he could dream of a dream world, because in a dream world there were many beautiful girls with wings, with many colours.

Meanwhile, evil Eve was sitting on a swing and singing a romantic song.

Behind her a young man approached and said:

- You have beautiful voice, young lady!

She said, feeling ashamed:

- Thank you.

Then, he turned around and asked her:

- Can you tell me your name?

- My name is Eve and you, kind gentleman?

- If you sing for me, I will tell you.

She started singing timidly.

- So, now tell me your name.

- Evan, my name is Evan. Your voice is wonderful, and so is this view.

- Thank you. Yes, it is beautiful.

- Mostly because you are here.

- Can you see that castle? That is my home next to it.

- Really? That castle is mine, next to your house. Tonight, in my castle, my family is going to have a ball. If you don't mind, I want you to be my partner.

(Scene missing)

The princess left the ball and she went to the garden. Aidan went after her. She sat on the swing and the prince approached her.

Aidan - My love, what's going on?

Eve – Oh my dear! I'm very well. You don't need to be worried.

Aidan – If you are fine, why did you leave the ball? Didn't you like the music, the people?

Eve – This is the most beautiful flower of my garden. I picked it for you.

Aidan – Oh, my darling! I feel bad. I thought that you were not feeling well. Come inside again.

Eve – Yes, let us go.

And slowly they both returned to the ball.

The following day, the morning was fantastic and the princess decided to go for a walk. Suddenly, Evan appeared.

Evan – I was looking for you to tell you something special.

Eve – Yes, tell me!

Evan – Will you marry me?

Eve – Oh my God! I don't know what to say...

He started to look at her and her long blond hair flew with the wind. He looked into her eyes and kissed her and said:

Romeo - I love you so much...Since I saw you, I can't get you off my mind.

Then, he held her hand in his and asked her:

Romeo - Would you like to marry me?

Eve - I'm sorry, but I can't do it.

Romeo - Can you tell me why?

Eve - When the night falls, I'll be here waiting for you. Then, I will tell you why I can't marry you.

Romeo - I will be here. Maybe you have a surprise for me.

Then they walked around the lake and each went their own way.

As the couple went away, two birds that were tweeting on a tree branch and looking at the couple said to each other:

– Ah! He is in love with her.

– Yes, love is a magnificent, romantic and wonderful feeling.

– Oh! Yes, it is.

– It's so beautiful.

- Yes, but the princess is pretending.
- You're right!
- Do you know why? Do you know why she is not in love?
- Ohhh! Piu!
- Because she is not who he thinks she is...

- Oh, how beautiful his love is...
- Yes, but it's a shame that their love is forbidden.
- But he is struggling to keep the spark of his love.
- But what if the love that he feels for her is not strong enough?
- I'm sure that he will do everything to be together with her.

The birds are witnessing how love is blooming in the heart of the young man. The place where they are is nature because nature is harmonious and the birds are singing and witnessing the affection he is feeling in his heart.

A couple of birds were also watching the real princess as she was remembering her sweetheart and how they met and fell in love.

- Sweetie, look at the wonderful daisy that he gave her and the princess is now holding in her hand. You did the same thing when we met.
- I remember this day as if it was today. You were sitting on that tree and you were beautiful and marvellous.
- I miss that day so much, it was the best day of my life. I remember you were sitting on my right hand side and gave me a daisy. When I saw you I fell in love with you.
- And when we danced together in that ball. Do you remember?

- Of course, I will never forget that day. And at midnight you took me to the lake and asked me to marry you.

- How I wish that time to come back!

- Do you think he will take her to the lake like you did?

- I don't know! She looks so lonely...

The sun is going down, the wind is calm, and the princess is going towards the castle. She is travelling in her carriage surrounded by the royal guard.

When they entered the forest, the horses became scared and suddenly they saw huge trolls with two-borded axes and maces. The guards stood around the princess' carriage to protect her. The trolls attacked the guards. They fought but Darkilling appears! Darkilling has a young and beauty image, but a very bad mind. She is evil Eve in disguise. She wants to kill the princess with her trolls, so that she can keep Aidan to herself. Evil Eve started to freeze all guards because she can do frost spells.

The princess realised that situation. The princess and her good fairy are inside the carriage and the princess got away to the forest while the fairy flies to call the prince.

Back at the castle, the beautiful princess is in her room and she is writing a letter to the man she loves because he is far away, and she hasn't heard from him in a long time. She is very sad because she can't go to the ball with her lovely prince charming, and to make things worse, her father didn't want his daughter with that man, because he wants to find for her the perfect husband. She told her father that she loves Aidan, but he didn't want to hear. So she decided to run away with him and is writing him a letter to tell him of her decision. She is sure that she will be happy with her young man whom she loves so much. She is saying in the letter many beautiful words about love and she is asking him when he is coming for her again.

Without her knowing, Aidan is not far from her. The young man she loves is outside the house preparing a surprise for her and the maid knows everything. She is looking at him through the window and she sees him talking with two more men to prepare a ball in the garden. The garden has a lot of flowers and a big lake. The lake has many diverse types of fish.

She sees many men loading chairs, tables and a huge cake. The prince will ask her: "Do you want to marry me?" And the maid is thinking: "How I would like a man to do this for me. She is very lucky. I will not tell her anything not to ruin his surprise. Love is unbelievable."

Appendix 22



Drawn by student n°25

aaaa



Drawn by student n° 25

bbbb



Drawn by student n° 25

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