



**Attitudes towards and assessment of spoken interaction in the primary
English classroom**

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Dedication

To my extraordinary children Teresa, Kate and Henry who make life meaningful and awesome and to my adorable puppy West that has filled our household with a renewed sense of joy!

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ATTITUDES TOWARDS AND ASSESSMENT OF SPOKEN INTERACTION IN THE PRIMARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS: primary English classroom, structured assessment tasks, feedback, formative assessment, language progress, spoken interaction and young learners

This report describes the action research project I engaged in as part of my practicum as a trainee teacher during my master's degree in teaching English in primary education. It investigated how I could assess spoken interaction during structured assessment tasks and what the influence of young learners' attitudes is on spoken interaction. The research took place in a private primary school in a town near Lisbon, Portugal. This study involved a group of 22 young learners in year four, eleven girls and eleven boys, aged between 9 and 10 years who had two weekly 60 minute classes of English during the afternoon. The study was implemented from mid-September 2020 to mid-December 2020, the main aim was to study how to formatively assess spoken interaction and what the influence of young learners' attitudes was on spoken interaction. The method chosen was a small-scale action research project. The research tools used were an observation grid, the use of a teacher's journal and questionnaires to the young learners. The study concluded that to formatively assess spoken interaction an observation grid is justified, and that the contribution of peer feedback contributed to the progress of young learner's language learning. Furthermore, it was observed that formatively assessing contributes to having less anxious young learners during assessment moments. There was also evidence that indicated the importance of collaborative peer work for young learner's language learning progress. Throughout the action research, it became evident that young learners who demonstrated positive attitudes towards spoken interaction structured assessment tasks progressed in language learning.

AVALIAÇÃO DA INTERAÇÃO ORAL E QUAIS AS ATITUDES DOS JOVENS APRENDIZES NO RESPEITANTE À DINÂMICA DE INTERAÇÃO ORAL NAS AULAS DE INGLÊS DO 1º CICLO

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RESUMO

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: avaliação formativa, avaliação de tarefas estruturadas interativas, interação oral, progresso na aprendizagem da língua estrangeira, feedback, jovens aprendizes, aulas de inglês do ensino primário

Este relatório descreve o projeto de pesquisa da minha prática de ensino supervisionada durante o Mestrado de Inglês no 1º Ciclo do Ensino Básico. O meu objetivo foi observar como poderia avaliar formativamente a interação oral de pares durante tarefas interativas estruturadas nas aulas de inglês do ensino primário e qual a influência das atitudes dos jovens aprendizes na interação oral nas aulas de inglês do ensino primário. Este estudo decorreu numa escola primária privada próximo de Lisboa, em Portugal. Este projeto envolveu um grupo de 22 alunos do 4º ano, onze raparigas e onze rapazes com idades compreendidas entre os 9 e 10 anos. Esta turma tinha duas aulas semanais de 60 minutos cada durante o período da tarde. O estudo decorreu entre meados de setembro 2020 e meados de dezembro de 2020. Foram planeadas e incluídas tarefas de interação oral estruturadas, a pares, nos planos individuais de aula. As ferramentas de pesquisa escolhidas para recolha de dados foram uma grelha de observação, anotações num diário de professor e pequenos questionários aos alunos. A recolha de dados permitiu concluir que a avaliação formativa de interação oral justifica por si uma grelha de observação e também evidenciou a importância do *feedback* dos pares no progresso da aprendizagem da língua estrangeira. O estudo também demonstrou que existem evidências positivas do trabalho a pares para o progresso da aprendizagem da língua estrangeira. Ao longo deste estudo observei que os alunos demonstraram atitudes positivas em relação á avaliação formativa de tarefas estruturadas interativas realizadas a pares. Os resultados deste estudo corroboram no tema da responsabilidade que os professores de inglês detêm em planear aulas com tarefas estruturadas interativas a pares, para promover uma maior interação dos jovens alunos no progresso da aprendizagem da língua estrangeira. O estudo indica que as atitudes, perante a avaliação formativa, dos jovens aprendizes melhoram com o decorrer da execução da avaliação de tarefas estruturadas.

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Introduction

Children are small human beings that grow and develop through talking and playing. McKay suggests that “elementary school teaching is based on principles of child growth and development” (2006, p.15). Similarly, Halliwell states that “children need to talk. They can learn about the language, but the only way to learn how to use it is to use it” (Halliwell, 1992, p. 8). For this reason, it is generally accepted that incorporating communicative tasks into everyday lesson plans is a good way of augmenting oral interaction between young learners (YLS). Cameron suggests “meaning must come first: if children do not understand the spoken language, they cannot learn it” (2001, p.36). The author puts forward “to learn discourse skills, children need both to participate in discourse and to build up knowledge and skills for participation” (2001, p.36). In other words, there is evidence that, oral interaction leads to speaking. Oliver and Philip (2014, p.5) propose that oral interaction “is the spoken language that takes place between two or more people and corresponds to the type of listening that occurs in real time in communicative interactions”. Furthermore, “oral interaction is collaborative and reciprocal with each speaker working to co-construct a meaningful exchange” (Oliver & Philip, 2014, p.5). Peer interaction provides practice and encourages YLS to become more confident at interacting and capable of supporting each other (helping each other like the teacher helps them) in an anxiety free environment, this way taking the focus off the teacher and providing a more friendly YL-centred classroom.

During my teaching years I worried a lot about excessive noise and off-task behaviour during communicative tasks, so the easy route was to avoid including these communicative tasks in my lesson plans. This is why I decided to choose how to formatively assess oral interaction and what are young learners’ attitudes towards spoken interaction. Klenowski suggests that formative assessment “is part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning” (2009, p.264). While investigating how to formatively assess spoken interaction and young learner’s attitudes towards formative assessment in the primary English classroom, not only do activities become less daunting, but we also learn what and how to put things in to practice. Answering these two questions provided me with strategies and knowhow in understanding what was necessary to formatively assess oral interaction and what were

YLs attitudes towards spoken interaction in the primary English classroom. Not getting YLs to interact in a communicative way meant that YLs did not have a chance to use the language, and not being able to experience the language does not contribute to YLs language learning. Until my practicum, I assessed spoken production through a show and oral presentation activity at the end of a unit of work. I assessed spoken production of all YLs during one lesson, and there was no YL interaction. Assessing only once at the end of a unit is assessing summatively. “At the end of a course of study, a teacher and others too, want to know how a student has progressed during a period of study” (McKay, 2006, p. 22). Assessing every lesson, formatively assessing, contributes to a more inclusive practice. The other teachers I spoke to also assessed in a similar way, assessing once at the end of a unit or at the end of a school year, and only assessing spoken production, once again leaving peer interaction out of the classroom. With this in mind, it seemed like a necessity for the teacher to understand how to formatively assess this spoken interaction in communicative tasks. Moreover, this led me to realize that it was also necessary to assess this spoken interaction in such a way that would allow YLs to progress in their language learning, which is why one of my research questions was *How can I formatively assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom?* The other research question, that I wanted to understand, was *What the influence of YLs attitudes is on spoken interaction in the primary English classroom?* Understanding the answers to these two questions was important to learn how to help and understand YLs progress in language learning in a ludic and motivating way, thus contributing to YLs positive attitudes in the primary English classroom.

To overcome the excessive noise and off-task behaviour anxieties, I learned that teachers need to be assertive and make clear the objective of the communicative tasks to the YLs, with simple, short instructions and make special reference to noise levels. Explaining the importance of using spy talk during these tasks. Subsequently, through observing other teachers modeling how to put communicative tasks in action and closely paying attention to YLs performing these tasks I learnt, by direct observation and writing notes in my teachers’ journal, how to include these tasks into everyday practice. Moreover, it became evident that the communicative tasks had to be age and level appropriate (very basic, pre A-1 level) and cater for a real need to interact.

The aim of my final report was to improve my everyday practice on how to formatively assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom and find out what

the influence of YLs attitudes is on spoken interaction in the primary English classroom. Discovering how to implement formative interaction assessment benefits a YL centred class as opposed to teacher centred class, allowing YLs the opportunity to demonstrate what they really know in multiple and non-stressful situations. Finding out how formative assessment in oral interaction really works turned the writing of this report into a fruitful professional development improvement, a vital source of enlighten my professional development. It was also very interesting to find out that YLs show positive attitudes towards spoken interaction structured assessment tasks and that these attitudes promote YLs language learning progress in a non-stressful way, increasing YLs confidence in interacting with each other.

Chapter I: Literature review

Literature review

This literature review aims to focus on the importance of formative assessment (FA), in understanding how spoken interaction can be formatively assessed in the primary English classroom and what the influence of YLs attitudes is on spoken interaction in the primary English classroom. The first section of the literature review shines light on the concept of spoken interaction. It then further explores, the strengths of formatively assessing spoken interaction. In other words, it examines the literature on how continuous FA can create more opportunities for young learners (YLs) of English to progress in their language learning and assist teachers in knowing what to teach next. The third section of this literature review is essential in considering how spoken interaction can be formatively assessed in the primary English classroom. The fourth section briefly examines the importance of YLs positive attitudes towards formative assessment of spoken interaction in the primary English classroom.

I.1 Spoken interaction

Read (2007, p.18) proposes that, “spoken interaction refers to the ability to ask and answer questions and handle exchanges with others”. Furthermore, Read suggests “It

is important to develop children's competence in this area in order to build up confidence and lay the foundations for future learning" (2007, p.18). Oliver and Philip, advance that "oral interaction is collaborative and reciprocal with each speaker working to co-construct a meaningful exchange" (Oliver & Philip, 2014, p.5).

In this balanced consideration of what oral interaction is, Read advances that "it is important to provide frameworks for speaking activities which encourage children to use English for real purposes which they can relate to" (Read, 2007, p.18). With this in mind, it is important to create interaction opportunities for YLs on a regular basis. Once we have agreed on the importance of spoken interaction in the YLE classroom, the next logical step seems to take us on to how to assess spoken interaction during communicative tasks to help YLs progress in their language learning. So, it seems appropriate at this stage to define assessment.

I.2 Definition of assessment

Jang defines language assessment as "a purposeful activity that gathers information about students' language development ... an activity whose primary purpose is pedagogical, that is, to help teachers plan instruction and guide student learning" (2014, p.5). Prosic'- Santovac and Rixon note that "assessment refers to principled ways of collecting and using evidence on the quality and quantity of people's learning" (2019, p. 1). This evidence of learning can be collected in one of two ways, either at the end of a period of time or during an on-going period of time, in other words, it can be summative or formative assessment. On one hand it is important to assess YLs "so as to give effective feedback to YL's, to actively involve YLs in their own learning, to adjust teaching, to recognise the influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of YLs and the need for YLs to understand how they can improve" (Papp & Rixon, 2018, p.24) and on the other hand, to show parents and school administrators what YLs effectively know.

I.2.1 Summative assessment

Prosic'- Santovac and Rixon (2019, p.2), view “summative assessment as backward-looking and concerned with finding out at the end of a period of learning how well the YL have performed in retaining content and/or in their use of skills taught”. The main drawback of summative assessment is that it raises the levels of YLs’ anxiety and fear, also feedback is late, if it ever takes place.

McKay emphasises that summative assessment information is required, “this information is needed not only to measure what has been learnt during the course, but also to report to others about achievement” (2006, p.22). Summative assessment is usually done at the end of a period of teaching, through a formal test where basically three skills are tested (listening, reading and writing) sometimes the fourth skill (speaking) is also assessed. It is rather difficult to assess YLs speaking due to the fact that they are so many YLs in each class, which poses a logistic issue. Speaking can be tested through a short interview or a short, structured activity. Since summative assessment represents a snapshot of learning, this learning may not include what the YLs really know. McKay reinforces the idea that summative assessment is “planned and carried out following formal procedures, students are organized to do the assessment task without support or interruption, and they then submit their work to the teacher for marking at a separate time” (McKay, 2006, p. 22). When YLs know that they are being summatively assessed they usually show higher levels of anxiety. However, most teachers use summative assessment since it takes up less teacher time and seems to keep school administrators and parents happy, as to knowing YLs level of English.

I.2.2 Formative assessment

Prosic'- Santovac and Rixon (2019), propose that formative assessment, looks to the future and considers ways of collecting information, evidence, on how successfully learners are behaving during a module or even a single lesson. This is what allows formative assessment to help teachers and YLs take action and make adjustments in future stages of learning. Integrating formative assessment in lesson plans seems to be the key to a child-centred learning and teaching classroom.

McKay suggests that “formative assessment is ongoing, usually informal assessment during teaching and learning” (2006, p. 21). The author proposes that formative assessment “is when teachers are collecting information about children’s strengths and weaknesses in order to provide feedback to learners and to make further decisions about teaching” (McKay, 2006, p. 140). Formative assessment provides the teacher with the YLs progress or lack of progress. This is justified since it is done on a more regular basis which allows the teacher to reformulate learning aims according to how YL respond and how they are faring. The author argues that “the teacher is the one most interested in the results of formative assessment; the data gathered helps him or her make further decisions about teaching” (McKay, 2006, p. 22). In other words, formative assessment helps YLs progress in language learning as opposed to summative assessment which checks what YLs have learnt at a specific moment. McKay proposes that “New knowledge is gained through a refined awareness of relationships between concepts and based on a child’s present understanding and on past experiences” (McKay, 2006, p. 25).

Moreover, McKay suggests that FA “refers to informal, instruction-embedded assessment that is formative in purpose and carried out by teachers in the classroom” (2006, p. 22). This type of assessment is more focused on the YLs progress in language learning. At this point it seems appropriate to mention some features of FA, such as feedback directly linked to structured assessment tasks, which involve YLs in the assessment procedure through self- and peer-assessment.

The Portuguese decree laws, Decree-Law no. 5908/2017 (2017, 5th of July) and Decree-Law no. 55/2018 (2018, 6th of July) favours formative assessment, although there is no mention of how to formatively assess learners. The Decree-Law no. 5908/2017, in section three, describes the components of learning assessment in its three dimensions: diagnostic, formative and summative assessment. For this project the major concern was formative assessment, which is described in this decree law as essential in supporting pedagogical differentiation strategies and how it should take on a systematic and continuous form. Formative assessment is considered as a form of support for learning and to aid students’ journey in learning. Decree-Law no. 55/2018, in section three, mentions the importance of formative assessment that leads to the continuous improvement in learning with the overall objective of incrementing learner school success. This decree law, no. 55/2018, emphasizes that formative assessment is the main

method of assessment that obtains systematic and privileged information and that involves learners in the process of self-assessment to help the learning progress.

FA implies direct data collection methods, such as observation or scrutiny of sample work that YLs have done in everyday classrooms (Rixon and Prosic-Santovac, 2019). This is a weakness since it takes up a lot of teacher time. Another drawback of formative assessment is that when the teacher includes in her next lesson plans revision tasks, not all YLs may need this revision to progress in language learning.

FA is a strategy that helps transform teacher-centred classes into YL centred classes, the interaction patterns often evolve with and around the learner instead of being teacher oriented. YLs play a very big part in informing the teacher not only about what they know but about their needs, providing indications of their levels of confidence and understanding (Rixon and Prosic-Santovac, 2019). Moon accounts for yet another formative assessment strength “the results of assessment are shared with the child and provide concrete suggestions for action” (Moon, 2000, p. 151).

Nikolov and Timple-Laughlin, state that “given the exponential growth in the popularity of early foreign language programs, coupled with an emphasis of evidence-based instruction, assessing young learners’(YLs) foreign language abilities has moved to centre stage” (2020). This is yet another advantage of formative assessment, where it seems mandatory to collect evidence of YLs individual language progress. Britton defends that “Assessment methods should account for the slow rate of progress. Efforts should be made especially to evidence the small steps in learning, and to account for the development of learners’ L1 literacy levels” (2021, p. 54). Furthermore, Rixon and Prosic-Santovac (2019) note that FA concerns the purposeful interaction between YLs and in particular the quality of the feedback exchanged. It is this feedback that will grant YLs progress in language learning and also permit the teacher to know what to include in future lesson plans with the objective of continuous progress. According to Nikolov and Timple-Laughlin, formative assessment has other advantages on the impact of YLs performance, such as, low anxiety, growth mindset, learning motivation, self-confidence, and a willingness to communicate (2020). Bennett corroborates with this idea “formative approaches should be conceptualised as part of a comprehensive system in which all components work together to facilitate learning. (2011, p. 5).

I.3. How to formatively assess oral interaction

Carless states that, “Learning-orientated assessment represents an attempt to emphasise these learning features of assessment and promote their development” (2007, p.58). Learning orientated assessment is related to formative assessment since the YL is at the centre of both concepts, it is important to enhance YLs learning. MacKay reports that “It makes sense to structure the assessment task in a way that reflects the kinds of learning tasks that optimize children’s motivation and interest in the language” (2006, p. 47). It seems imperative that there should be more moments of assessment during tasks that are fun and meaningful for YLs.

Structured assessment tasks, which Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou refer to as being “normal activities that are given an assessment focus that reflect sound teaching principles such as creating authentic, child-centred activities” (2003, p. 2&9) seem to be a good way of doing formative assessment. Structured assessment tasks are closely linked to classroom practices used with children. These are stress free moments, that correspond to everyday YL life experiences and where YLs can show what they know and what they need help with, in order to progress in their language learning. Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou argue that with FA, YLs will be familiar with the format of the assessment tasks, so they don’t see them as something different or alien, and the tasks do not create anxiety or other negative feelings. On the contrary, they can encourage positive attitudes in that they may be seen as a fun thing to do (2003, p. 5). Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou define structured assessment activities as “tasks organized by the teacher in order to assess knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as the ability to apply these to new situations” (2003, p. 9).

These activities/tasks can be constructed in such a way that they reflect sound teaching principles such as creating authentic, child-centered activities. Activities particularly suitable for children are ones in which they demonstrate understanding by doing. (Ioannou-Georgiou & Pavlou 2003, p.9).

I.4. Formative assessment feedback

Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou suggest that “feedback helps children to discover their strengths and weaknesses, motivates them, and helps them to persist in their learning” (2003, p.14).

Feedback to learners is of two kinds. Feedback to individual children may be immediate, most likely during scaffolding within the assessment. Feedback may also be given to the child after the records have been collected and evidence interpreted – perhaps in an individual conferencing session or in written form on the child’s work. (McKay 2006, p. 152).

Britton emphasises the usefulness of “feedback techniques, which can be used by the teacher and for self and peer assessment, which offer opportunities for YL to recognise their own achievements and also to have them recognised by their peers” (2021, p.112). The teacher becomes aware of YLs necessities can include them in future lesson plans with the objective of promoting progress in YLs language learning. Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou suggest that while formatively assessing “observations are not usually systematically recorded and so cannot be used for assessment” (2003, p.12). It is important to register observations so that the correct feedback can be given to the YLs, and that no formative assessment feedback is forgotten. The authors advise “To record observations systematically, try to make short notes soon after the lesson and keep them on file; or use checklists” (2003, p.12). Mackay suggests that “Records need to keep track of the processes as well as the products of learning and need to be easily interpreted when final reporting to parents and others is due” (2006, p. 141). Furthermore, the authors advise “We cannot be completely fair to children and parents unless we systematically record our observations” (2003, p.141). The authors advocate “We can usually solve these problems if we use a written observation record rather than trying to keep mental notes” (2003, p.142). I strongly agree on the necessity of keeping observation results registered, it is important to keep a record of all observations, for instance in the form of a grid.

The clarity, practicality and fairness of observation checklists depend on factors such as the kinds of descriptors teachers select and how they make their decisions about competency. Classroom assessment is an integral part of learner and learning-centered curriculum in which young learners can thrive (2006, p. 174).

Furthermore, the author proposes that “Classroom assessment can encourage children to participate in the learning process and can build motivation and confidence in children as they are given ongoing support to learn” (2006, p. 280). Classroom assessment improves YLs motivation and understanding of what YLs are doing and what is expected of them. With this information, and the feedback given to the YLs while completing the assessment tasks, or immediately after, promotes language learning.

Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou put forward that “feedback is an integral part of the assessment process and should follow as soon as possible after the assessment task is carried out” (2003, p.14). The feedback given is what is going to facilitate the language learning. Moon defines feedback as “the information provided to someone on their performance” (2000, p. 182). According to Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou, “feedback helps children to discover their strengths and weaknesses, motivates them and helps them to persist in their learning” (2003, p.14). This feedback can be given by the teacher or by peers. Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou put forward “this feedback can be given by the teacher or by peers during structured assessment tasks. Teacher feedback can be given individually to each YL or to the whole class (2003, p. 14)”. The teacher can give feedback at the end of the task and plan future lessons knowing what YLs know and what they need to learn or consolidate. It is important to motivate YLs with positive feedback as well as what needs improving, Cooze advocates that “positive feedback is just as important as telling our students how to improve” (2017, p. 55).

Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou suggest that “Peer-assessment can positively influence the classroom atmosphere because children learn to respect and accept each other through assessing each other’s work” (2003, p. 10). Peer assessment is another way in which YLs can improve their language learning in a learner centred way. McKay advocates “children bring different experiences and motivations to their learning, individualized needs assessment and subsequent targeted feedback during teaching helps to enhance success and therefore motivation” (2006, p. 46). Peers can use many strategies such as: supplying, vocabulary or help needed to form sentences or help with understanding to form meaning. McKay suggests that “Self- and peer-assessment is a teaching strategy as much as an assessment strategy” (2006, p. 166). This strategy also contributes to YL autonomy which is always beneficial for YLs.

I.5. Attitudes towards spoken interaction

Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou propose that “fostering positive attitudes in childhood should be a priority, since this is the best time to form strong positive attitudes towards learning, the target language and the target culture” (2003, p.8). Promoting positive attitudes in YLs reduces uncertainties, thus motivating YLs to try using the new language, thus learning new language. The authors suggest that “When it comes to attitudes and motivation, observation yields much better results than any questionnaire” (2003, p.141). Observing YLs during a task, allows for the teacher, or the peer, to fill in the learning gap and contribute to the language learning process. Read advises that “through speaking activities which use different interaction patterns and provide opportunities for meaningful practice of a range of discourse types, children will develop confidence in their ability to produce English and to interact with others in class” (2007, p.19). When YLs enjoy and positively collaborate in structured assessment tasks the foundations for the creation of positive attitudes towards formative assessment are set.

McKay suggests that “Classroom assessment is an integral part of learner and learning-centered curriculum in which young learners can thrive” (2006, p. 174). Furthermore, the author proposes that “Classroom assessment can encourage children to participate in the learning process and can build motivation and confidence in children as they are given ongoing support to learn” (2006, p. 175). Formative assessment contributes to making a learner oriented environment for language learning, the learning happens around the learner.

I.6. Summary

Formatively assessing YLs spoken interaction is fundamental in FL acquisition. The literature reviewed on this theme indicates the importance of formatively assessing YLs spoken interaction with tasks that are engaging, meaningful, have a purpose, use authentic language, are challenging, develop critical thinking skills, give YLs a voice and recycle language. Keeping a record of YLs performance allows the teacher to gather evidence of learning progress and give feedback which contributes to further learning and motivation. Involving YLs in the assessment procedures establishes a climate of positive

attitudes towards assessment. YLs can take direct responsibility, knowing what they (self-assessment) or their peers (peer-assessment) can do to improve the learning. Thereby, it seems crucial to find out how to assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom and to know what the influence of YLs attitudes is on spoken interaction in the primary English classroom. Establishing a climate of positive attitudes towards YLs involvement in participating in structured assessment tasks seems to contribute to language learning progress. As McKay says “Assessment has the power to change children’s lives” (2006, p. 25).

Chapter II: The Action Research

II.1 Context

I did my practicum at a private school, Escola Luís Madureira in Amadora, which belongs to the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* and caters for children from six months onwards until year 9. I taught a year four group of twenty-four young learners, thirteen boys and eleven girls, all with Portuguese nationality. Twenty-three young learners were nine-year-old’s, and one was ten years old. This class had two lessons per week of sixty minutes each in the afternoon. The course book adopted by the school was *Let’s Rock! 4* (Abreu & Esteves, 2017). This coursebook follows the “Metas Curriculares de Inglês no 1º Ciclo” (Cravo, Bravo, & Duarte 2014), which is the state curriculum for the first cycle.

The classroom was small and due to Covid-19 restrictions there was little space for the teacher to move easily in between desks. The school provided various teaching tools: the course book and attached activity book with a picture dictionary included, two white boards, an overhead projector and *escola virtual* online resources as well as internet. Unfortunately, this year four class teacher (for these last four years), their only schoolteacher they have ever had since they were in primary school, left in mid-October without giving any previous warning. This really upset these YLs, even more so if we take into consideration that class teachers are like second mothers to young learners, spending more time with most YLs than their mothers. Leaving this year four group at this point, when all around them was already so uncertain and many new routines were demanded due to covid-19, made it even more challenging for these YLs learning process.

I taught seventeen solo lessons, over a span of two curriculum thematic units. My lesson plans aimed at creating and including structured assessment tasks to understand how I could formatively assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom and what the influence of YLs attitudes is on spoken interaction in the primary English classroom. It was important to answer these two questions, keeping in mind the “Metas Curriculares” (Cravo, Bravo, & Duarte, 2014), that emphasize that year four YLs should be able to “express accordingly in simple contexts and interact with peers and/or teacher in simple and previously prepared situations”, (p.14).

II.2 Methodology

The central idea of action research, as declared by Burns, “is to intervene in a deliberate way in a problematic situation in order to bring about changes and improvements in practice” (2010, p.2). To accomplish this, I followed Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1998), model of action research. This is a cyclical model, each cycle composed of four phases: planning, action, observation and reflection. With this in mind and a need to understand how to formatively assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom and what the influence of YLs attitudes is on spoken interaction in the primary English classroom, the foundations for a small-scale action research were set. The first phase was to identify what I would have to do to formatively assess spoken interaction, and at this point it became obvious that I needed to plan for and include structured assessment tasks in my English lessons and record YLs spoken interaction observations. It was also necessary to observe and understand what the influence of YLs attitudes was on spoken interaction in the primary English classroom, also here it was necessary to register these observations, which I did in my journal and through questionnaires to YLs. Action and observation took place from mid-September 2020 to mid-December 2020. Reflection and conclusions followed in January 2021 to understand how I could formatively assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom and what the influence of YLs attitudes was on spoken interaction in the primary English classroom.

II.2.1 Permissions and ethical considerations.

It was necessary to take into consideration some ethical themes, such as requesting and receiving permission to undertake this action research, from parents or tutors, the school administration and from the YLs themselves. YLs chose pseudonyms related to animals, to always maintain confidentiality. Informed consent for this research was obtained through letters of consent (Appendices A, B and C). These letters included the topics and objectives of the research, strategies that would be implemented, data to be collected, how the study would be made public and a return slip to be signed by the parents and by the YL. All letters were written in Portuguese and the YL letter was age adapted and explained during a lesson previously planned for that effect. During this lesson YL were free to ask all questions they had concerning the study and gave their opinions and feelings on taking part in the research.

II.2.2 Data Collection tools

The data collected during my project had the objective of answering my research questions: How can I formatively assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom? and What is the influence of YLs attitude on spoken interaction? I used structured assessment tasks, an observation grid, a questionnaire to YLs and a teacher journal to register pertinent YLs comments and other information.

II.2.2.1 Incorporating structured assessment tasks

Planning and incorporating structured assessment tasks, in everyday classes, which YLs enjoy and are engaged in allows for practice in a meaningful and motivated way, which helps language learners progress in their language learning. Seven communicative structured assessment tasks were designed and included in seven lesson plans, one per lesson. The purpose of these tasks was for YLs to practice vocabulary, pronunciation, structures and interaction. The communicative structured assessment tasks were:

Task 1: Interview your friend. (appendix D)

Task 2: Ask and answer, *What month is it?*, and say the corresponding ordinal number. (appendix E)

Task 3: What do you do on Monday? (appendix F)

Task 4: Play a boardgame. (appendix G)

Task 5. Ask and answer, *What time is it?* (appendix H)

Task 6: Animal Pelmanism. (appendix I)

Task 7: Guess the animal. (appendix J)

The seven oral tasks were carried out by YLs in pairs, four previously defined pairs of YLs were observed and assessed in their structured assessment tasks to find out how to formatively assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom and what the influence of YLs attitudes was on spoken interaction in the primary English classroom. Due to covid_19 the choice of pairs of YLs was rather limited. It was possible for the teacher to choose one YL to observe, but the other YL of the dyad had to be seated immediately behind or in front or to the right or to the left. To try and observe as much differentiated interaction as possible, I chose dyads that included one strong YL, one average YL, one weak YL and the fourth dyad had a very strong YL with a very weak YL to better observe how I could formatively assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom and examine what the influence of YLs attitudes is on spoken interaction in the primary English classroom.

II.2.2.1.1 Task 1: Interview your friend

It was explained to YLs that now they would interview a friend. The teacher divided the class into pairs and handed out a grid (appendix D) to each YL to register his own and his friend's answers. An example of the grid was projected on the board and the teacher explained that each YL would have a turn to ask the questions on the grid and write their friend's answers, and a turn to answer his friend's questions and to write these answers on the grid. The objective of these questions was for YLs to ask and answer simple personal questions and for the teacher to assess YLs ability to do this. The teacher picked a volunteer YL to model what had been said, taking turns in asking, answering and writing the questions on the grid that was projected on the white board. The teacher

checked for understanding, by picking a pair of volunteer YLs to come up front and model what had been said and done. The teacher thanked the volunteer YLs and picked another volunteer YL to say the rules of the structured assessment task in L1, checking for understanding again. The teacher reminded the YLs of pair work rules: use spy talk, speak English, raise your hand if you need help, you have six minutes to complete the task, when you hear the buzzer please stop and put your hands on your heads.

II.2.2.1.2 Task 2: What month is it? and say the corresponding ordinal number.

It was explained to YLs that now they would do an interactive task in their assigned pairs; so YLs always worked with the same partners. The teacher reminded the YLs of their previously assigned pairs and handed out a month and ordinal numbers prompt card (appendix E) to guide each YL in knowing what to ask and answer, in case of doubt. The objective of this task was for YL to practice ordinal numbers and the months and for the teacher to assess YLs ability to do this. The prompt was projected on the white board and the teacher explained that one YL of each pair would have a turn to ask *What month is January?*, while his friend would answer *It's the first*. Then it would be the friends' turn to ask the question and the other YL to answer. Each young YL had five turns to ask the question, choosing a different month each time. The teacher picked a volunteer YL to model what had been said, taking turns in asking and answering the question. The learners were reminded of pair work rules.

II.2.2.1.3 Task 3: What do you do on Monday?

The teacher handed out a supporting form, with the days of the week to each learner (appendix F). Learners were told to play in pairs and that they should take turns in asking their friend the question *What do you do on Monday?* and write the answer on the form. The friend had to answer *On Monday I dance*. After asking the question for each day of the week, the friend asked the questions. The objective of this task was for YL to practice the days of the week and action words (verbs). In order to remind learners

of the action words, they were informed that they could look them up on page fourteen of the student's book. Once again, the teacher modelled the activity with a volunteer learner and afterwards invited two learners to do the task. The teacher reminded the class of pair work rules.

II.2.2.1.4 Task 4: Play a boardgame.

It was explained to YLs that now they would play a board game in their assigned pairs to practice the vocabulary. The teacher distributed a copy of the boardgame and a die to each YL (appendix G). The boardgame was projected on the white board and the teacher explained how to play. The teacher demonstrated with a volunteer YL the game rules. The teacher thanked the volunteer YLs and picked another volunteer YL to repeat the rules of the game in L1, this way checking for understanding one more time. The teacher reminded the class of pair work rules. The aim of this task was for YL to practice the days of the week, months, recycling vocabulary and taking turns and for the teacher to assess YLs ability to do this.

II.2.2.1.5 Task 5: Ask and answer.

YLs were told they would ask and answer the question *What time is it?* in pairs and using the cardboard clocks (appendix H) they had assembled for homework the previous lesson. The teacher reminded the class of their pairs and pointed to the part of the summary on the board where the question *What time is it?* was and possible answers (*It's three o'clock. It's half past four.*) indicating the time on her cardboard clock. The teacher explained that each YL would have a turn to ask *What time is it?* (putting the clock hands on the respective time), and a turn to answer his friend's question, *It's three o'clock., or It's half past four.* YLs repeated the question five times each. The teacher picked a volunteer YL to model what had been said, taking turns in asking and answering the time with their cardboard clock, previously setting the minute and hour hands on the selected time. The teacher checked for understanding, by picking a pair of volunteer YLs to come up front and model what had been done. The aim of this task was for YL to

practice asking, telling the time and turn taking and for the teacher to assess YLs ability to do this.

II.2.2.1.6 Task 6: Animal Pelmanism.

It was explained to YLs that now they would play pelmanism to practice the animal names, with the animal cards that they had cut out and coloured at home (appendix I). The teacher explained while demonstrating with her animal picture flashcards the rules, where YLs were asked to first shuffle the animal flashcards then place the cards with the animals facing down on the table, turn over one card and say the name of the animal then turn over another card and say the name of the animal. If the two cards were the same, YLs kept them if the cards were different YLs should turn them down again. YLs were reminded to look carefully and remember the animals and where they were. The game finished when there were no more cards on the table. The winner was the player with most cards. The aim of this task was for YL to practice saying the names of the animals and turn taking and for the teacher to assess YLs ability to do this.

II.2.2.1.7 Task 7: Guess the animal.

It was explained to YLs that now they would play a guess the animal game to practice animal actions, with the picture cards that they had prepared (appendix J), in their previously assigned pairs. The teacher wrote the structures on the board: What animal is it? It can climb but it can't fly. The teacher explained demonstrating that, one YL from each pair, would pick a picture flashcard without showing it to their friend and say one action the animal could do, for example, *It can run*, and one action it can't do, *but it can't fly*; and ask the question *What animal is it?* And the friend had to guess *It's a dolphin*. The YL asking the question answered *Yes, that's right!*, if the friend guessed the correct animal and showed the card he was holding or answers *No! Sorry try again*. Each friend had three guesses on the third *No!* the YL held the animal card and showed it and said *It's a dolphin*; and it was the friends turn to choose an animal and say what the animal *can and can't do*, this way repeating the process. The teacher thanked the volunteer YLs

and reminded the learners of pair work rules and also that YLs could look at the *Your turn! My Turn! Yes, that's right!, No! Sorry try again.* signs (appendix K) on the wall to help you. YLs took turns in guessing the animals for ten minutes, when the YLs heard the buzzer, they knew it was time to put their hands up and stop.

II.2.2.2 Observation grid

To formatively assess spoken interaction, I adapted an observation grid (appendix L) from Ioannou-Georgiou & Pavlou (2003, p. 182). Initially, for the first three communicative tasks, this grid was divided into three assessment criteria: fluency, task achievement and pronunciation. Fluency was limited because the tasks did not require YLs to produce extended stretches of language. From the fourth task onwards, three more assessment criteria were included: vocabulary, structures and discourse management. These criteria were included since they are responsible in shaping YL spoken interaction. Each assessment criteria was measured considering three levels of achievement (level one, level two and level three), where level one stands for weak, level two stands for average and level three stands for strong), as can be observed on the following matrix:

Table 1 Assessment Criteria

adapted from <https://www.teachingforexcellence.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/World-language-sample-writing-speaking-rubrics.pdf>

Criteria variables	Level 1/weak	Level 2/ average	Level 3/ strong
Fluency	YLs interaction flowed smoothly, thus resulting in effective interaction without pauses.	Some interaction took place with frequent hesitation or some long pauses.	Interaction was difficult due to frequent and long pauses or hesitation.
Task achievement	The task was carried out successfully and was easy to follow.	The task was carried out with some difficulty but achieved	Difficulty in carrying out the task.
Pronunciation	YLs had very good pronunciation and word stress resulting in easy understanding.	Pronunciation and word stress were acceptable, and understanding was comprehensible	Difficulties in pronunciation and word stress shown throughout the task, making

			understanding difficult.
Vocabulary	YLS used the correct vocabulary.	YLS did not use correct vocabulary consistently throughout the task.	YLS struggled to use the correct vocabulary.
Structures	YLS used the correct structures.	YLS did not use the correct structures consistently throughout the task.	YLS struggled to use the correct structures.
Discourse Management	YLS took appropriate turns in asking and answering the questions.	YLS were not sure when it was their turn to ask or answer a question.	YLS struggled to know when it was his turn to ask or answer the questions.

The grid was filled in by the teachers' direct observation of task completion by the dyads of previously chosen YLS. These YLS were observed during the seven assessment tasks, during which the grid was filled in and other comments were also added (both on the grid and in the teachers' journal).

II.2.2.3 Formatively observing spoken interaction of structured assessment tasks

The seven oral tasks were carried out by YLS in pairs, four previously defined pairs of YLS were observed and assessed in their spoken interaction assessment tasks to find out how formative assessment could take place in this area. Due to covid_19 the choice of pairs of YLS was rather limited. It was possible for the teacher to choose one YL to observe, but the other YL of the dyad had to be seated immediately behind or in front or to the right or to the left. Four dyads of YLS were chosen to be observed filling in the observation grid accordingly. The first dyad was Jaguar and Koala who were both weak YLS. The second dyad was Cat and Walrus, Cat was a strong YL while Walrus was a weak but eager YL. The third dyad of YLS was Seahorse and Tiger both average YLS and the fourth dyad was Owl and Mouse both strong YLS. These dyads of YLS were chosen to observe the differences in the progress of spoken interaction of weak, average

and strong YLs, trying to observe if there was a predefined pattern in YLs speaking interaction and their abilities.

II.2.2.4 Questionnaires

The questionnaires had the objective of finding out what the influence of YLs attitudes was on spoken interaction, if by the end of doing the seven structured assessment tasks, there had been any significant influences in the YLs attitudes towards spoken interaction. Basically, the topics addressed were if YLs like to learn English and how, through course books, videos, listening to audios, singing songs, structured assessment tasks, playing games, learning about other people and / or reading stories. The questionnaire was given to all YLs before the first structured assessment task in September 2020, and then again after the last structured assessment task in December 2020. There were nine closed questions in total, the data was analysed by categorization per questionnaire. The questionnaire can be viewed in appendix M. The aim of comparing YLs answers at these two different moments (September 2020 and December 2020) was to try and identify what the influence of YLs attitudes was on spoken interaction in the English primary classroom.

II.2.2.5 Teacher journal

I kept a teacher's journal where I noted YL's attitudes towards the structured assessment tasks in the primary English classroom and wrote quick notes on how I can formatively assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom, as well as YL's comments.

II.3 Results

Here I will analyse and understand the data retrieved through the observation tools (grid, teaching journal and YL questionnaires) which I applied during my action research to answer my research questions: How can I formatively assess spoken interaction in the

primary English classroom? and What is the influence of YLs attitudes on spoken interaction?

II.3.1 Observation grid results

Observing the four dyads of YLs and registering these observations, then categorizing the results and designing individual graphs for each YL of each dyad, revealed interesting evidence. As can be inferred from the graphs presented, during the first three structured assessment tasks observations made were for the criteria fluency, task achievement, pronunciation. However, from the fourth structured assessment task onwards we can see that other criteria were also observed, namely, vocabulary, structures and discourse management.

II.3.1.1 Dyad Jaguar and Koala

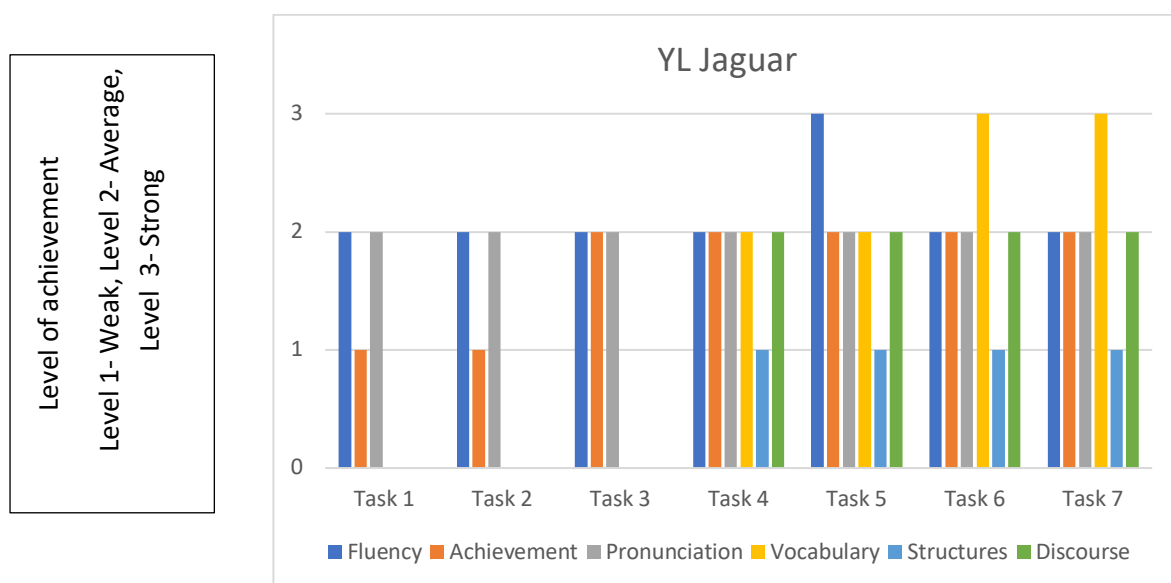


Figure 1 – Structured Assessment Task Results

The first dyad consisted of two weak YLs whose pseudonyms were, Jaguar and Koala. Jaguar was an agitated YL and showed difficulties in completing tasks as we can observe in figure 1. While formatively assessing spoken interaction, I noted in my journal that this YL needed to have more practice using vocabulary and structures. His fluency

was average reaching a high peak in task five, the clock task. In practically all tasks, to support Jaguars' fluency I pointed to vocabulary picture cards and structure prompts of the task being assessed which were on display on the board or on the structured assessment task sheets, but this support was not sufficient to observe consistent progress. We can also observe that Jaguar had some difficulty in learning vocabulary but improved in the last two tasks, which were related to animal vocabulary. Task six and seven, both used animal vocabulary, which was a form of repeating this vocabulary to aid pronunciation and vocabulary.

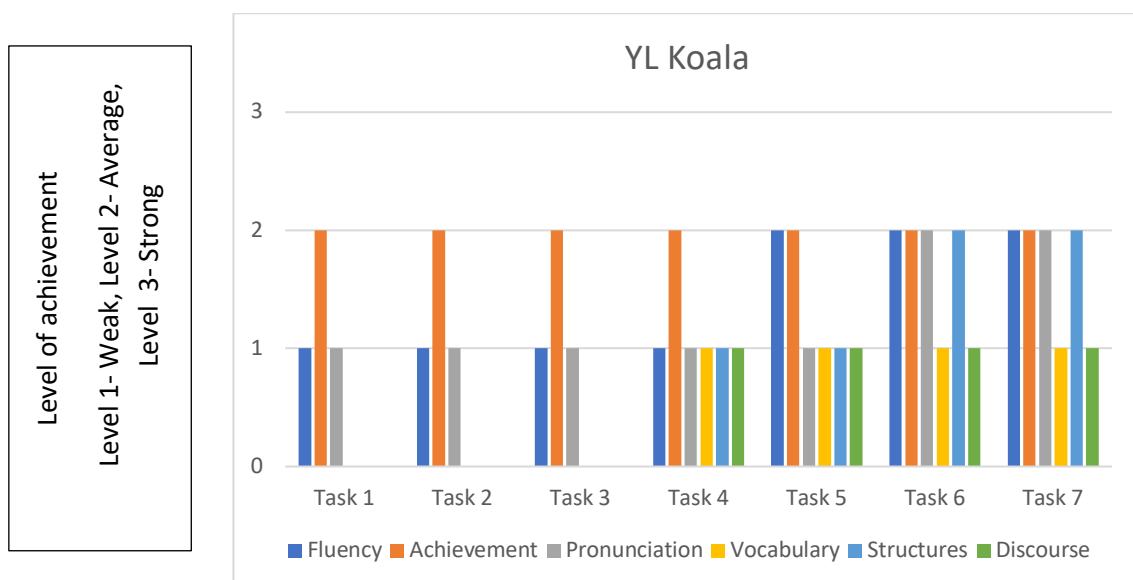


Figure 2 - Structured Assessment Task Results

Jaguar worked with Koala who was also a weak YL as we can see in figure 2. By formatively assessing spoken interaction during the structured assessment tasks, I observed that Koala's fluency progressed from Jaguar's continuous support in offering Koala feedback (often using L1 "isso quer dizer..." that means....). These strategies helped Koala produce more output. Even though Jaguar was a weak YL, he took the lead and, in this way, helped Koala progress. Koalas' formative spoken interaction results show that Koala needed more support to initiate interaction, so I included a review of how to do this in my next lesson plans. During the structured assessment tasks, I opted to praise Koala when possible (good job! awesome!), this type of praise also helped build on

Koala's self-confidence. Giving this positive teacher feedback helped create positive attitudes towards task achievement.

II.3.1.2 Dyad Cat and Walrus

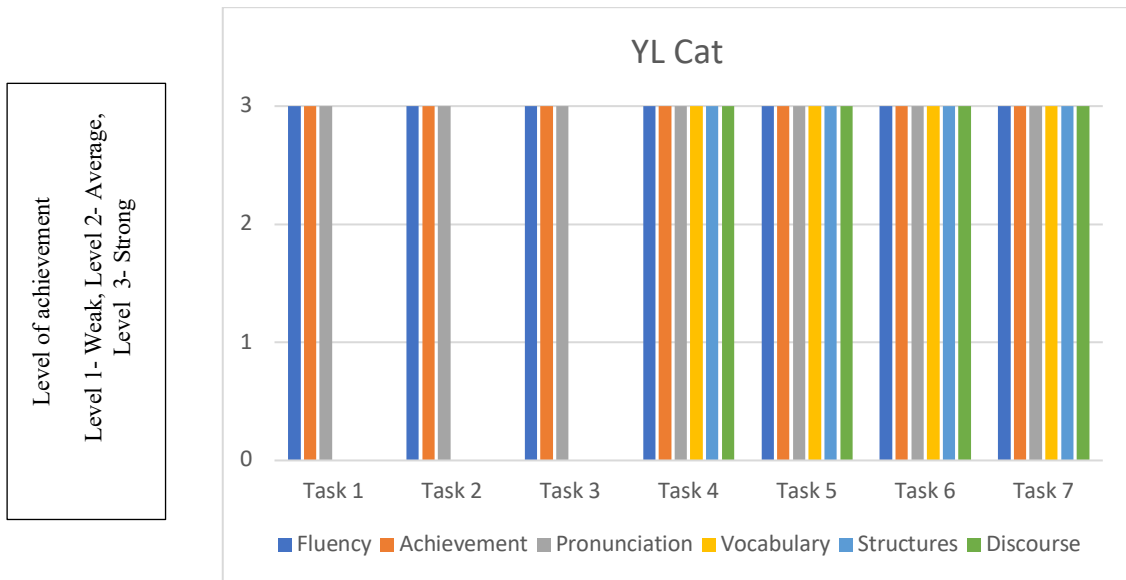


Figure 3 - Structured Assessment Task Results

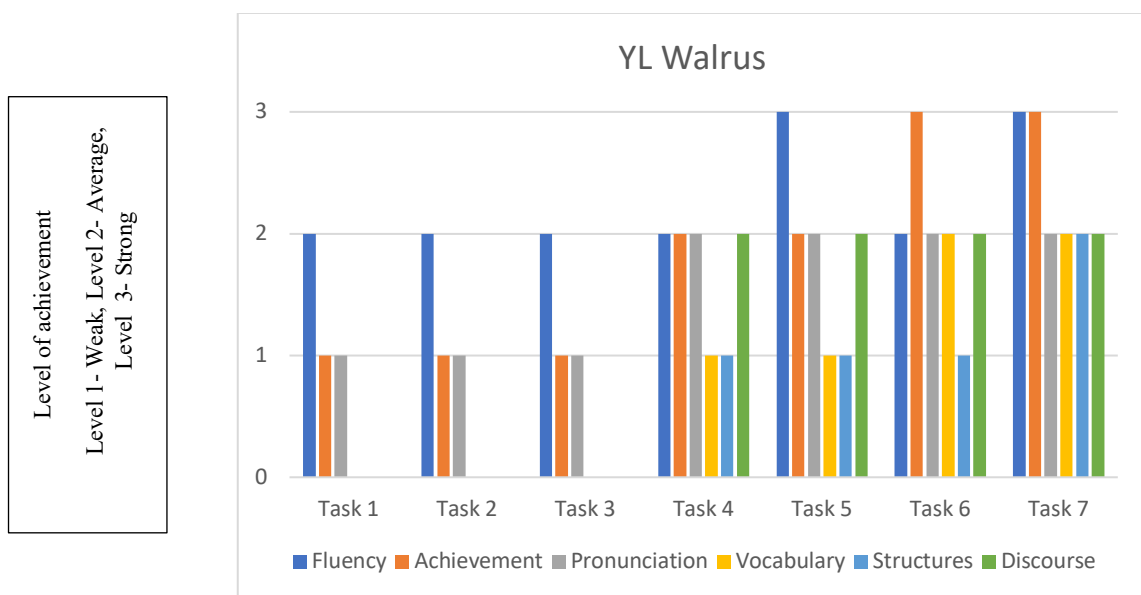


Figure 4 - Structured Assessment Task Results

Figures 3 and 4 show the assessment results of pair two, whose pseudonyms were Cat and Walrus. Cat was a strong and motivated YL, who had English out of school. She took a leading role and helped Walrus focus on the task and told him what to do in L1. Walrus benefitted from working with Cat. Peer feedback was crucial for Walrus' progress, while building up on Cats' confidence. Through giving immediate feedback Cat helped Walrus using L1, both to promote interaction and to say the vocabulary and structures in English. For example, in structured assessment task four, the boardgame, I had jotted in my journal, Cat said "agora é a tua vez de jogar, diz *My turn!*", when Walrus' die landed on the glass bottle and Wulrus showed signs of not knowing how to say the correct word by emitting the sound "“uuum”", Cat said "vidro é glass", this type of peer feedback helped Walrus progress in his language learning objectives and complete the task successfully. YLs learn from each other and help each other and feel at ease during pair work, their anxiety levels are null when compared to talking in front of the whole class or directly to the teacher.

II.3.1.3 Dyad Seahorse and Tiger

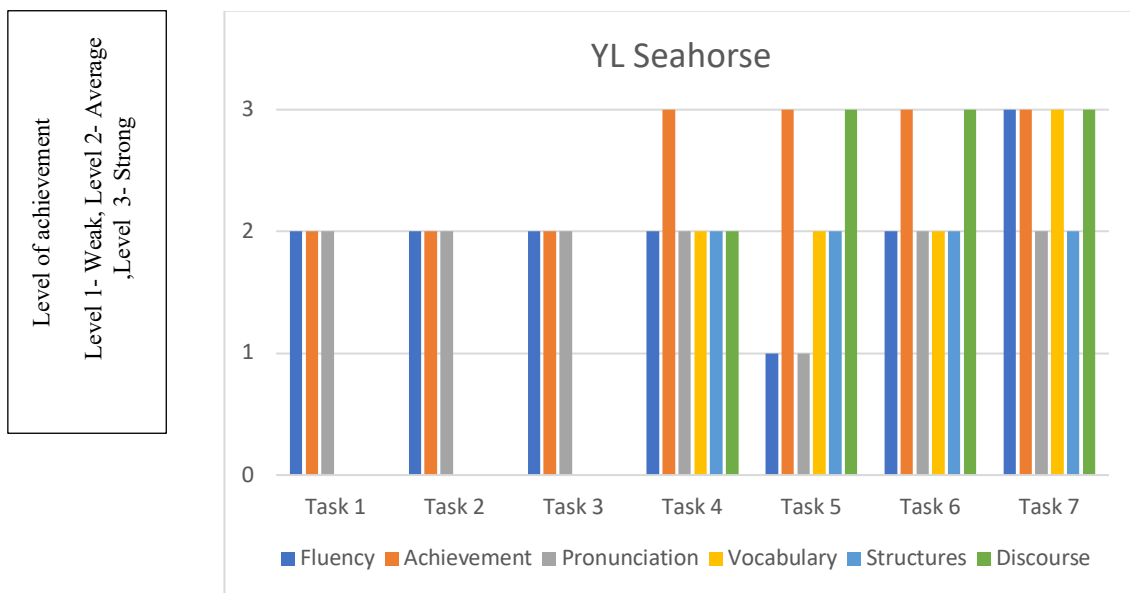


Figure 5 - Structured Assessment Task Results

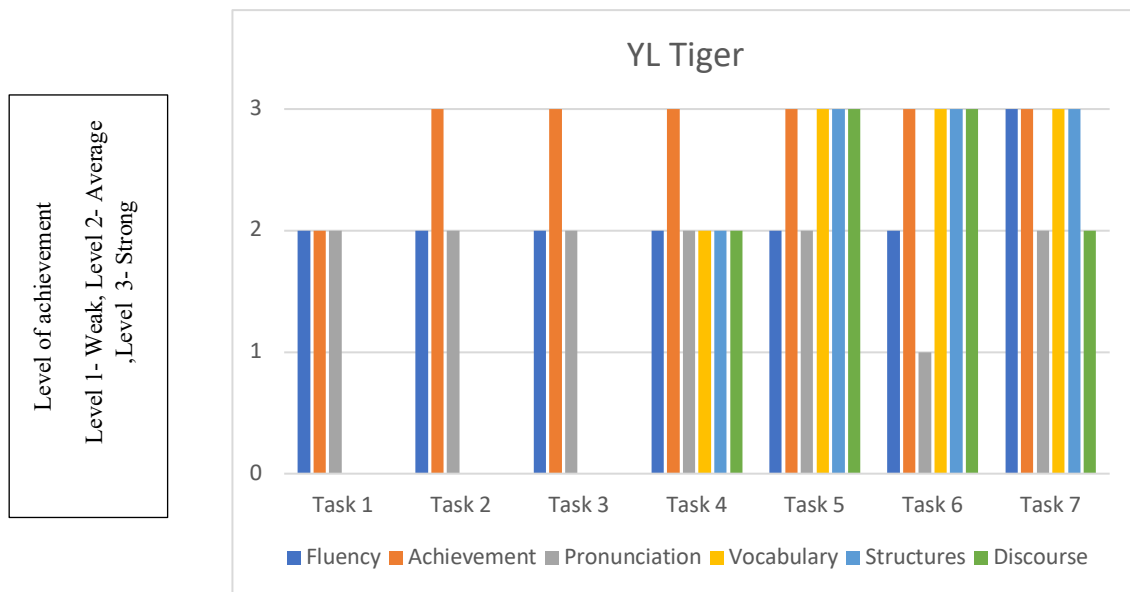


Figure 6 – Structured Assessment Task Results

Figure 5 and figure 6 show the assessment results of pair three, whose pseudonyms were Seahorse and Tiger. Whilst formatively assessing pair three YLs, I witnessed that, Seahorse was a rather shy YL. He had some difficulty in keeping on task, but he showed progress in these criteria basically due to Tiger’s constant feedback. While assessing spoken interaction, I noticed that pronunciation for both YLs was average, they had difficulty in the pronunciation of sounds, for example, *th*, in structured assessment task 2 where YLs had to say the ordinal numbers, the endings of fourth, fifth were said as *fort*, *fift*, and so on. I corrected their pronunciation of the sound “*th*”, with a recast, “good fourth, good fifth” stressing the “**th**” sound but their excitement to complete the task did not help the YLs to progress in the pronunciation of the “*th*” sound. I planned to work on this with these YLs in future lessons, namely to begin the lesson with the karaoke version of the ordinal numbers song to practice the pronunciation of the sound **TH**. Tiger corrected Seahorse structures using L1, for example, in structured assessment task six, Seahorse said, “Is a cow” and Tiger would recast “diz It’s a cow”, and Seahorse repeated and improved the use of correct structures. As can be inferred, peer correction, given in the form of feedback, is a motor for language learning. I also kept a note in my journal that said that Seahorse at the end of structured assessment task seven, which repeated the use of animal vocabulary (that had also been used in structured assessment task six), said “Eu gostei de repetir o vocabulário muitas vezes, porque assim aprendi”.

II.3.1.4 Dyad Owl and Mouse

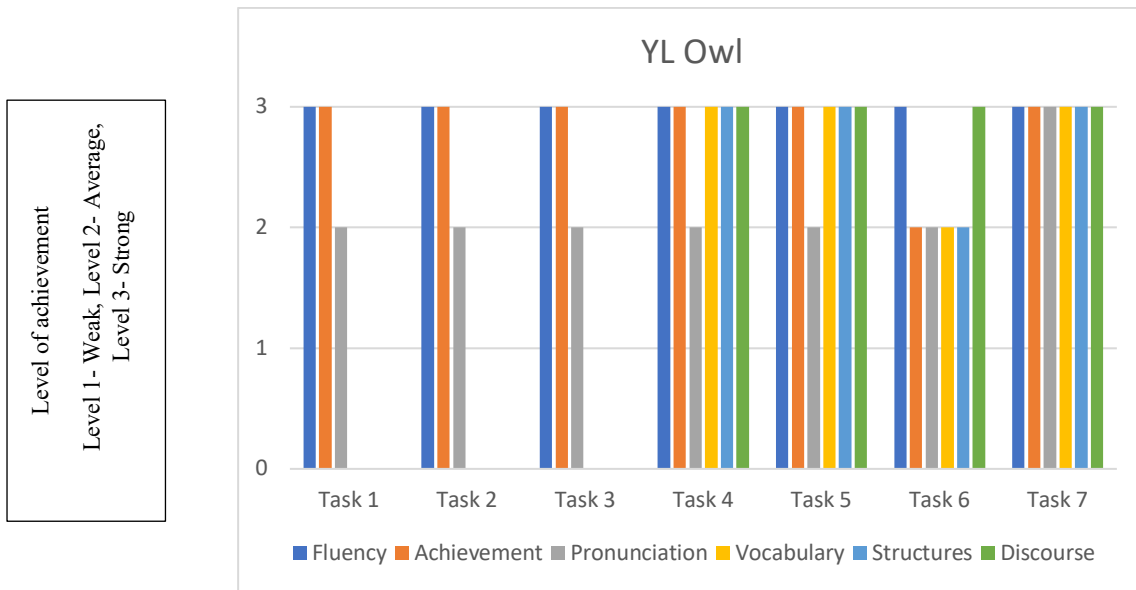


Figure 7 - Structured Assessment Task Results

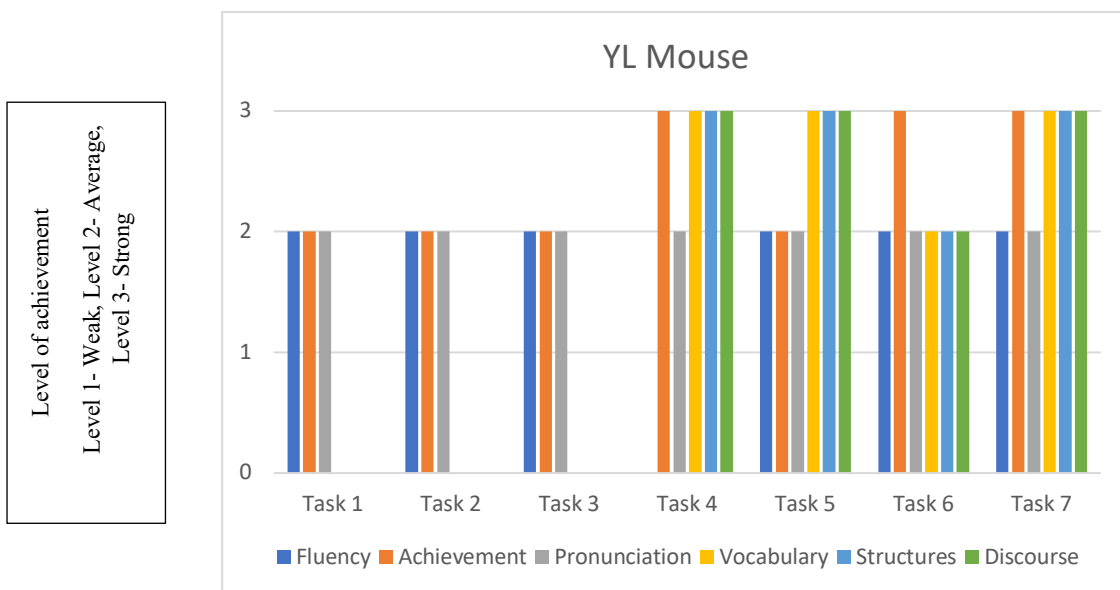


Figure 8 - Structured Assessment Task Results

In figures 7 and 8 we can observe the assessment results of pair four, whose pseudonyms were Owl and Mouse. Overall Owl was a slightly stronger learner and helps Mouse by using L1. Both YLs communicate a little in L1. In terms of pronunciation, I

gave feedback on the moment, with a recast of what had been said, for example in structured assessment task three, Mouse said “On *Tuesday* I dance” I gave positive feedback, recasting with “Good, on **Thursday** you dance”. This also happened with Owl in this structured assessment task, when Owl answered “On Tuesday I swim” I gave immediate positive feedback, recasting with “Good, on **Thursday** you swim”. In this case pronunciation improved, so the feedback given by the teacher was taken up by the YLs. I also noted in my journal that Owl helped Mouse using L1, by saying “Vá pergunta tu, tens de dizer *My turn!* e fazer a pergunta” in structured assessment task five, when it was Mouses’ turn to ask the question. And Mouse then said “My turn! What’s the time?” showing his clock with the handles on half past four.

In all observed pairs of YLs, feedback of the observed criteria (fluency, task achievement, pronunciation, vocabulary, structures and discourse management) was considered part of how to formatively assess spoken interaction. The feedback was given individually and directly by the teacher at the end of the task or on the spot using positive feedback. It was also given by peers directly during the task, which is known as peer-feedback (Ioannou-Georgiou & Pavlou, 2003). YLs were collaborative and at ease at receiving and giving feedback through supplying vocabulary, helping to form longer utterances and explaining what the partner did not understand (this last strategy was done using translation). Feedback was also given to the whole class, when I observed that more than half of the observed YLs had shown difficulty in any of the criteria being assessed and incorporated this as revision and recycling items in future lesson plans. I learnt that YL’s interact, using peer-feedback to improve each other’s language understanding.

II.3.2 The attitudes questionnaire

YLs answered an attitude questionnaire at two different moments in time. The data from these questionnaires was collected, counted, analysed and results were registered on table 1. Table 1 presents and compares the results from the answers YLs gave in September 2020 and the answers given by the YLs in December 2020.

Table 1

YLS attitudes towards English language learning

n=22

Affirmations	YLS answers (number and % of YLS)					
	Questionnaire I			Questionnaire II		
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1- I like learning English	19	3	0	22	0	0
	86%	14%	0%	100%	0%	0%
2 - I like my course books	18	4	0	20	2	0
	82%	18%	0%	91%	9%	0%
3 - I like watching videos	20	2	0	21	1	0
	91%	9%	0%	95%	5%	0%
4 - I like listening to cds/audios	20	2	0	19	3	0
	91%	9%	0%	86%	14%	0%
5 - I like singing songs	20	2	0	20	2	0
	91%	9%	0%	91%	9%	0%
6 - I like oral tasks	17	3	2	20	2	0
	77%	14%	9%	91%	9%	0%
7 - I like playing games	21	1	0	22	0	0
	95%	5%	0%	100%	0%	0%
8 - I like learning about other people	21	1	0	20	1	0
	95%	5%	0%	91%	5%	0%
9 - I like reading stories	18	3	1	15	6	1
	82%	14%	5%	68%	27%	5%

Questionnaire I (appendix D) was completed in October when majority of YLS said that they liked learning English (86%), this number rose to 100% in December, which validates that YLS enjoyed learning English during this period of time. Results pointed out that 82% of YLS liked their course books in October, this number rising to 91% in December. 91% of YLS said they liked learning English through watching videos in October, this value rising slightly to 95% in December. In October 91% of YLS affirmed they liked listening to audios, this number decreasing slightly to 86% in December. The same number of YLS like singing songs in October and in December, 91%, no variation during the period observed. Oral tasks (where the structured assessment tasks were included) in October counted with 77% of YLS agreeing that they liked learning through oral tasks, 14% were neutral and 9% didn't like learning through oral tasks, as opposed to 91%, 9% and 0% for same parameters in December. This result supports that YLS

demonstrate positive attitudes concerning spoken interaction. In October, 95% of YLs agreed that they liked playing games, this percentage rising to 100% in December. The item, learning about other people decreased slightly from October to December (95% versus 91%). Item nine, reading stories seemed to be what YLs enjoyed less in both periods analyzed, these numbers fell from 82% (agree), 14% (neutral) and 5% (disagree) in October to 68% (agree), 27% (neutral) and 5% (disagree) in December. I attribute these numbers to the fact that YLs generally do not read stories in English out of school.

This table answered my second research question: What the influence of YLs attitudes is on spoken interaction? Looking at item six, *I like oral tasks*, the positive number variation shows evidence that the influence of YLs attitudes is positive on spoken interaction. The numbers confirmed that the YLs were engaged and enjoyed the oral tasks. Klenowski suggests that “what is distinctive about assessment for learning is not the form of the information or the circumstances in which it is generated, but the positive effect it has for the learner” (2009, p.264).

II. 4 Discussion

The aim of this project was to answer my two research questions: How can I formatively assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom? and What the influence of YLs attitudes is on spoken interaction?. The purpose of the project was to understand how structured assessment tasks were a valid tool in assessing YLs formatively, and what criteria was necessary to register these formative assessment results and also if YLs have positive attitudes (or not) towards completing structured assessment tasks.

II.4.1 Brief summary of how to formatively assess spoken interaction and findings

To formatively assess YLs spoken interaction seven structured assessment tasks were designed and incorporated in everyday classes and four pairs of YLs were observed. These observations were registered on a grid. It was different to observe only a small

group of YLs during seven lessons, instead of observing all YLs in one lesson, usually at the end of a thematic unit with a show and tell. Formative assessment seems to make it fairer and more real since it assessed what YLs really knew. Basically, YLs were assessed over a period of time and over a wider range of contents on a regular basis.

Formatively assessing spoken interaction during structured assessment tasks is also anxiety free, since YLs are not exposed directly to the whole class and/or teacher, they are collaboratively working with a friend, with their age and maturity, and can easily seek and give help. YLs feel good using the language and it gives them a sense of achievement. This positive, collaborative classroom atmosphere where YLs feel safe to make mistakes and ask each other for help is a foundation for the success of structured assessment tasks. Furthermore, formatively assessing spoken interaction in this way also contributes to build on YLs need to produce longer utterances which help them to convey meaning, improve fluency and satisfy their need to “show what they know”. This process establishes a real use for YLs language learning. Teacher feedback and peer feedback contributed to promote YLs progress in their language learning. Feedback given by peers are ways of creating YL centered lessons, the learning occurs around the YL.

II.4.2 Brief summary of attitudes towards assessment of spoken interaction in the primary English classroom and findings

To find out what the influence of YLs attitudes was on spoken interaction, all YLs were given a questionnaire to complete before the first oral task, and the same questionnaire was completed again by all YLs at the end of the seven oral tasks. To answer my second research question, what the influence of YLs attitudes was on spoken interaction, the sixth statement “I like oral tasks”, gained YLs choice of option for the smiley face. This meant that there was an increase in the number of YLs who agreed in liking oral tasks at the end of the seven oral tasks (when compared to the number of YLs who chose the smiley face option (agreed to liking oral tasks) before the YLs engaged in completing the seven oral tasks, which indicated that YLs have positive attitudes towards spoken interaction.

II.4.3 Discussion

During this action research the main findings were to learn how to formatively assess spoken interaction in the Primary English classroom and to find out what the influence of YLs attitudes is on spoken interaction. To answer the first question, YLs completed seven structured assessment tasks and four previously chosen pairs of YLs were closely observed. The observed interaction criteria were fluency, task achievement, pronunciation, vocabulary, structures and discourse management. The observations for these criteria were registered on a grid designed for the effect, over a period of ten weeks. These observations were categorized and their distribution per task, per dyad and per YL were investigated.

Data analysis showed that YL progress in language learning while completing structured assessment tasks, through peer feedback. Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou suggest that “The children also discover that they can learn from their peers, not just from their teacher” (2003, p.10). This is what I observed in my results, peer feedback was a motivator to help YLs understand more and thus progress in their learning language objectives. It was observed that formatively assessing contributes to having less anxious young learners during assessment moments.

To answer the second question of this action research: What the influence of YLs attitudes is on spoken interaction?, YLs completed a questionnaire at two different moments, in September 2020 and then again in December 2020. The data of these questionnaires was analysed, categorized and their distribution per item and per moment (moment one September 2020, moment two December 2020) and respective variations were analysed. This showed evidence of the importance of collaborative peer work for young learner’s language learning progress. Throughout the action research, it became evident that young learners who demonstrated positive attitudes towards spoken interaction structured assessment tasks progressed in language learning.

Formatively assessing YLS with structured assessment tasks gives the YL a better understanding of what he or she is going to do and why he or she is going to do the assessment task. It is clear to the YL what is expected, and the teacher observes and registers what needs to be learnt and what is already learnt. At this point, clear and direct

teacher feedback, as well as peer feedback, is the language learning process. The teacher observations also help the teacher to plan future lessons with what needs to be learnt.

II.4.4 Importance of this action research for professional growth and for the YLs

Conducting this action research made me aware of all the details a teacher must keep track of in order to formatively assess spoken interaction, in a way that will lead to determining the next learning and teaching aims and also in giving YLs the correct formative feedback and the importance of when to give this feedback. This is to say, what YLs need to know, to better understand how to progress in language learning. The process of formatively assessing spoken interaction represents the moment when the teacher has the opportunity to observe and register what learners really know and what they are struggling with, thus what feedback needs to be given and when. It can be given by peers spontaneously, or during the task by the teacher using facial expression, body language, gestures and intonation or later in time (end of the lesson or future lesson to the whole class) so as to contribute to the YLs progress in language learning.

Formatively assessing spoken interaction, is creating specific structured assessment tasks after the language has been presented and practiced, incorporating these tasks in the lesson plan and planning what to look at, how to look at and whom to monitor, as well as recording all these observations in a practical way to be effective in future learning and teaching classes. Moreover, assessing YLs spoken interaction, is indeed a very dynamic component of the learning and teaching language experience. It is the feedback of this formative assessment, be it teacher-feedback or peer-feedback or self-assessment, that provides the foundation for progress in real YL spoken interaction in the primary English classroom. Throughout this action research study there was evidence to suggest the importance of pair work and peer-feedback in the primary English classroom with the aim to increment YLs experience of using the FL and thus progressing in language learning. As can be observed in the dyads where there was a stronger YL who took the lead and offered feedback to help their friend, for example in Walrus's graph he improves his results over time mainly due to Cat's constant prompting. YLs interact to improve each other's work. In short, this action research project has helped me to greatly

develop my diagnostic competence and the understanding of the importance of diagnostic competence.

Engaging, in learning how to formatively assess oral interaction in the primary classroom and what the influence of YLs attitudes is on spoken interaction in the primary classroom, helped me to learn how to make accurate judgements and plan appropriate support for YLs. In other words, my insights on how I can formatively assess led me to understand the greatness of formative assessment, namely in setting language aims, monitoring progress and providing quality formative feedback. This journey also showed me how to comprehend that progress after peer-feedback was immediately visible, and most YLs progressed in the attributes formatively assessed: fluency, task achievement, pronunciation, vocabulary, structures, and discourse management.

I learnt how to formatively assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom and that formative assessment has a positive influence on YLs attitudes on spoken interaction in the primary English classroom. So, assessment is fundamental, I learnt that teachers must do assessment to know where our YLs are at and to help them progress using a learner-oriented interaction pattern instead of teacher oriented interaction pattern. I learnt that teachers must start small, providing guidance in small steps at a time. Once YLs get used to collaborating in structured assessment tasks, the rewards will follow for both YLs and teachers. The time the teacher invests in explicitly teaching, modeling and scaffolding how to do the structured assessment tasks will pay its dividends in the long run.

The journey to understanding these discoveries has definitively contributed towards my professional growth. I learnt how to formatively assess spoken interaction in the primary English classroom using previously planned structured assessment tasks, observing YLs and registering progress or lack of progress. It was also important to notice that using structured assessment tasks is also a good way of reducing teacher talking time, which contributes greatly to having a more YL centered classroom. I learnt that I needed to develop my diagnostic competence, and that this is an ongoing process for professional development. Britton puts forward “teachers need to develop their diagnostic competence. This can enable them to make accurate judgements and appropriate support for their learners” (2021, p. 46). It became obvious that having YLs complete, previously

planned, structured assessment tasks provides input for the teacher to plan language objectives for the next lessons, according to YLs observed results.

II.4.5 Future research related to this theme

Continuing to explore how to formatively assess spoken interaction seems likely to supply further insights into this theme. Completing and adapting more action research cycles on this action research question will provide effective outcomes in terms of YL progress in spoken interaction, thus in widening the scope of the YLs experience of the English language. To conclude in a simplistic manner, it is the feedback that results from formatively assessing spoken interaction, that the teacher, peers and the YLs self-assessment builds the foundations for the YLs to increase their level of spoken interaction. Just like the seasons and the years go by, formative assessment structured tasks must be planned for and included in everyday English classes and accounted for to keep the momentum going. The more formative assessment structured tasks YLs perform, the easier it becomes to use this type of assessment since YLS are more familiar with the process. My teaching practice will be forever changed, and my next area of development will be self-assessment.

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Appendix A: Letter of consent to YLs



Let's Help Teacher Mónica!

Ajudar a Teacher Mónica a descobrir como pode melhorar e o que deve observar para compreender melhor o que sabemos dizer em inglês e a forma como o dizemos.



A Teacher Mónica vai observar-te enquanto falas os exercícios em inglês, vai gravar a tua conversa e vai também tirar apontamentos.



A Teacher Mónica também vai perguntar de que forma aprendes melhor e o que sentes enquanto estás a falar em inglês.



A Teacher Mónica vai escrever um estudo com as suas observações e conclusões, para poder mostrar a outros professores de inglês.



A Teacher Mónica explicou que só participa quem quer, e posso começar por participar e desistir quando quiser. Também disse que o meu nome não vai aparecer, ninguém vai saber que sou eu. Quem quiser participar vai ter um nome de animal, há 26 animais donde posso escolher um, cada animal começa com uma das 26 letras do alfabeto em inglês.



A Teacher Mónica acha que este estudo vai ser divertido e vai permitir conhecemo-nos melhor uns aos outros e a mim próprio. Por vezes pode acontecer, não saber dizer alguma palavra em inglês, mas os meus amigos ou a Teacher Mónica vão ajudar-me.



O estudo da Teacher Mónica vai decorrer durante as aulas de inglês e vai continuar até antes do Natal. Podes sempre perguntar á Teacher Mónica todas as dúvidas e perguntas que tiveres em relação ao estudo. Os teus Pais, já sabem que a Teacher Mónica te explicou tudo sobre este estudo e que a Teacher Mónica perguntou se queres participar ou não.



Queres saber mais alguma coisa? Pergunta á Teacher Mónica.



Responde desenhando um sol na caixa que corresponde á tua decisão de **participar** ou **não participar** no estudo:

Eu **quero participar** neste estudo.

Eu **não quero participar** neste estudo.

Nome: _____

Assinatura: _____ Data: _____



Appendix B: Letter of consent to parents

Pedido de autorização aos Encarregados de Educação

Caros pais e encarregados de educação,

O meu nome é Mónica Campos Pereira e é com muito gosto que irei estar com o seu educando, no meu estágio nas aulas de Inglês, durante o 1º período deste ano letivo.

Sou aluna da Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas na Universidade Nova de Lisboa, e estou presentemente a fazer o Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo do Ensino Básico. O meu mestrado inclui um pequeno projeto de investigação que deverá ser levado a cabo durante o meu estágio, e que posteriormente constará no meu relatório final. O meu projeto de investigação tem como título:

“Assessing spoken production and spoken interaction in the primary English classroom” (Avaliação da produção oral e interação na sala de aula). Com este estudo pretendo averiguar como se pode avaliar, de forma não invasiva, a produção oral e interação dos alunos de forma regular e permanente na sala de aula.

Venho por este meio, solicitar a vossa autorização para poder incluir o vosso educando neste projeto que, decorrerá durante o meu estágio, no primeiro período deste ano letivo. Depois de pedir autorização ao seu educando para o incluir no meu estudo, a recolha de dados será feita através de jogos pedagógicos, gravação do diálogo dos alunos e pequenos questionários em que os alunos poderão dar as suas opiniões sobre alguns aspetos que considero pertinentes para as aulas de Inglês. Os dados obtidos serão referidos no meu relatório final de mestrado. A participação dos alunos é voluntária e anónima, e a qualquer momento os alunos podem decidir não participar. Em nenhuma circunstância serão tiradas fotografias às crianças ou à escola. Caso tenha alguma questão a colocar ou necessite de mais esclarecimentos, agradeço que me contactem pessoalmente através da professora titular da turma.

Agradeço a vossa autorização para a participação do vosso educando no meu estudo, e peço que entreguem a autorização assinada.

Grata pela atenção e disponibilidade,

Mónica Pereira.

Professora Doutora Carolyn E. Leslie

Orientadora de Estágio

FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

24 de setembro 2020



Eu, _____, Encarregado de Educação do aluno/

aluna _____, declaro que fui informado dos objetivos do projeto intitulado “Assessing spoken production and spoken interaction in the primary English classroom”, e autorizo o meu educando a participar no referido projeto.

Data: _____

Assinatura do Encarregado de Educação:

Appendix C: Letter of consent to school administrators

Pedido de autorização ao Diretor da Escola

Exma. Sra. Diretora, da Escola Luís Madureira, Dra. Anabela Val,

O meu nome é Mónica Campos Pereira e foi com grande satisfação que soube da possibilidade de estagiar na sua escola durante o 1º período deste ano letivo.

Sou aluna da Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas na Universidade Nova de Lisboa, e estou presentemente a fazer o Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo do Ensino Básico. O meu mestrado inclui um pequeno projeto de investigação que deverá ser levado a cabo durante o meu estágio, e que posteriormente constará no meu relatório final. O meu projeto de investigação tem como título:

“Assessing spoken production and spoken interaction in the primary English classroom” (Avaliação da produção oral e interação na sala de aula). Com este estudo pretendo averiguar como se pode avaliar, de forma formativa, a produção oral e interação dos alunos de forma regular e permanente na sala de aula.

Venho por este meio, solicitar a sua autorização para poder aplicar o meu projeto de investigação na sua escola, durante o meu estágio que decorrerá durante o primeiro período deste ano letivo. Depois de pedir autorização aos encarregados de educação e aos educandos, será feita uma recolha de dados através de observações de jogos pedagógicos, gravação do diálogo dos alunos e pequenos questionários em que os alunos poderão dar as suas opiniões sobre alguns aspetos que considero pertinentes para as aulas de Inglês. A participação dos alunos é voluntária e anónima, e em qualquer momento os alunos podem decidir não participar. Os dados recolhidos durante o projeto serão referidos no meu relatório final de mestrado. Em nenhuma circunstância serão tiradas fotografias às crianças ou à escola.

Grata pela atenção e disponibilidade,

Mónica Pereira

Professora Doutora Carolyn E. Leslie

Orientadora de Estágio

FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

24 de setembro 2020



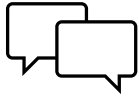
Eu, _____

declaro que fui informada dos objetivos do projeto “Assessing spoken production and spoken interaction in the primary English classroom” e que autorizo a aluna de mestrado Mónica Campos Pereira a desenvolver o seu projeto durante o seu estágio, que será feito na minha escola.

Data: _____

Assinatura do Diretor da Escola:

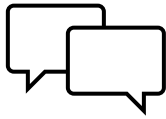
Appendix D: Structured assessment task 1



Instructions: fill in the grid and interview your partner.

	Me	My friend
1. What is your name?		
2. How old are you?		
3. Where are you from?		
4. Who is your best friend?		
5. How old is he/she?		

Appendix E: Structured assessment task 2

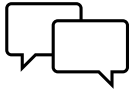


Me: What month is **January**?

My friend: It's the **first**.

January	1 st - First
February	2 nd - Second
March	3 rd - Third
April	4 th - Fourth
May	5 th - Fifth
June	6 th - Sixth
July	7 th - Seventh
August	8 th - Eighth
September	9 th - Ninth
October	10 th - Tenth
November	11 th - Eleventh
December	12 th - Twelfth

Appendix F: Structured assessment task 3



S1 - What do you do on Monday?

S2 – On Monday I dance.

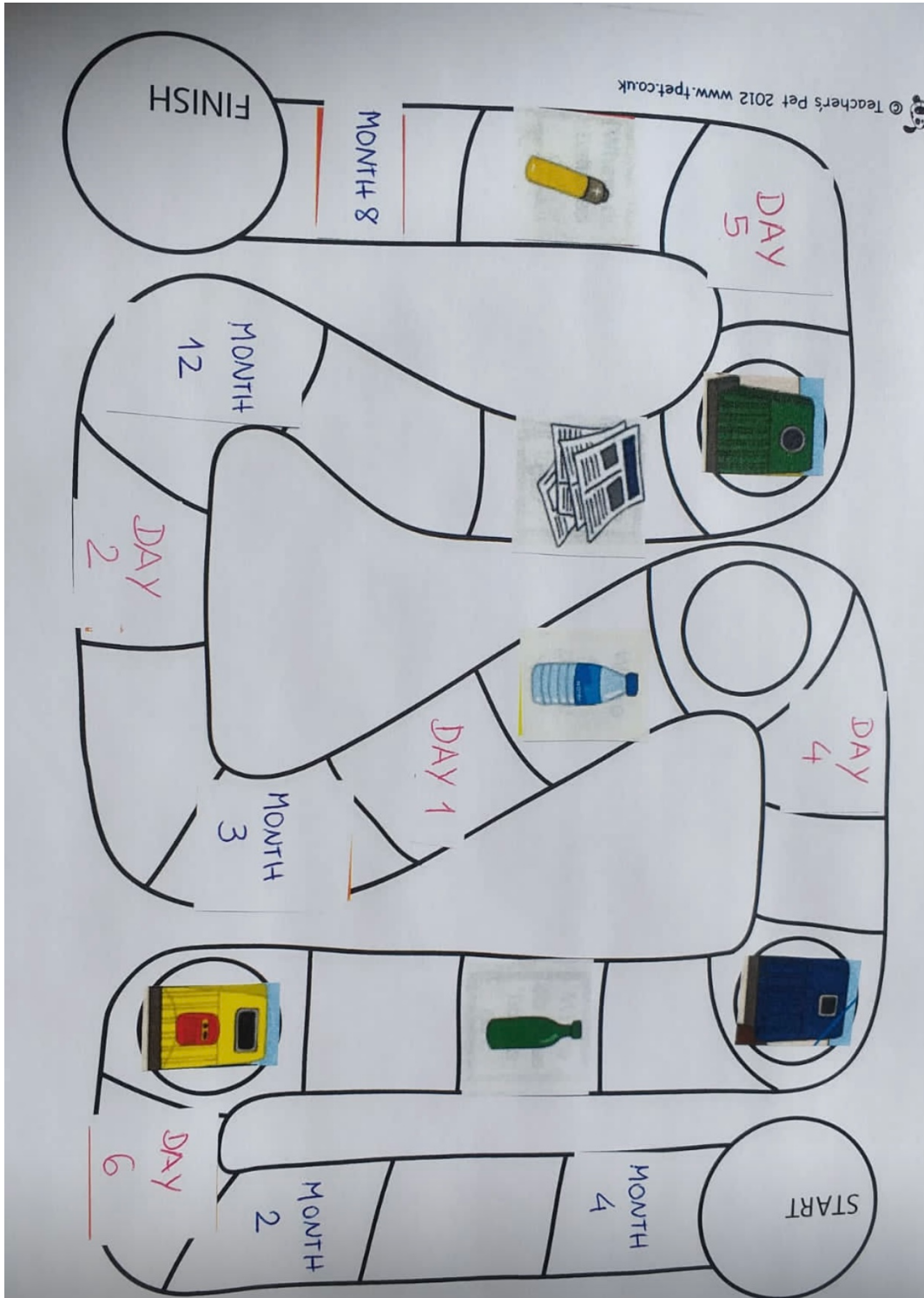
Read and use the verbs from the song and from the box in your student's book on page 14.

Day Name	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Friend							
Me							

Appendix G: Structured assessment task 4

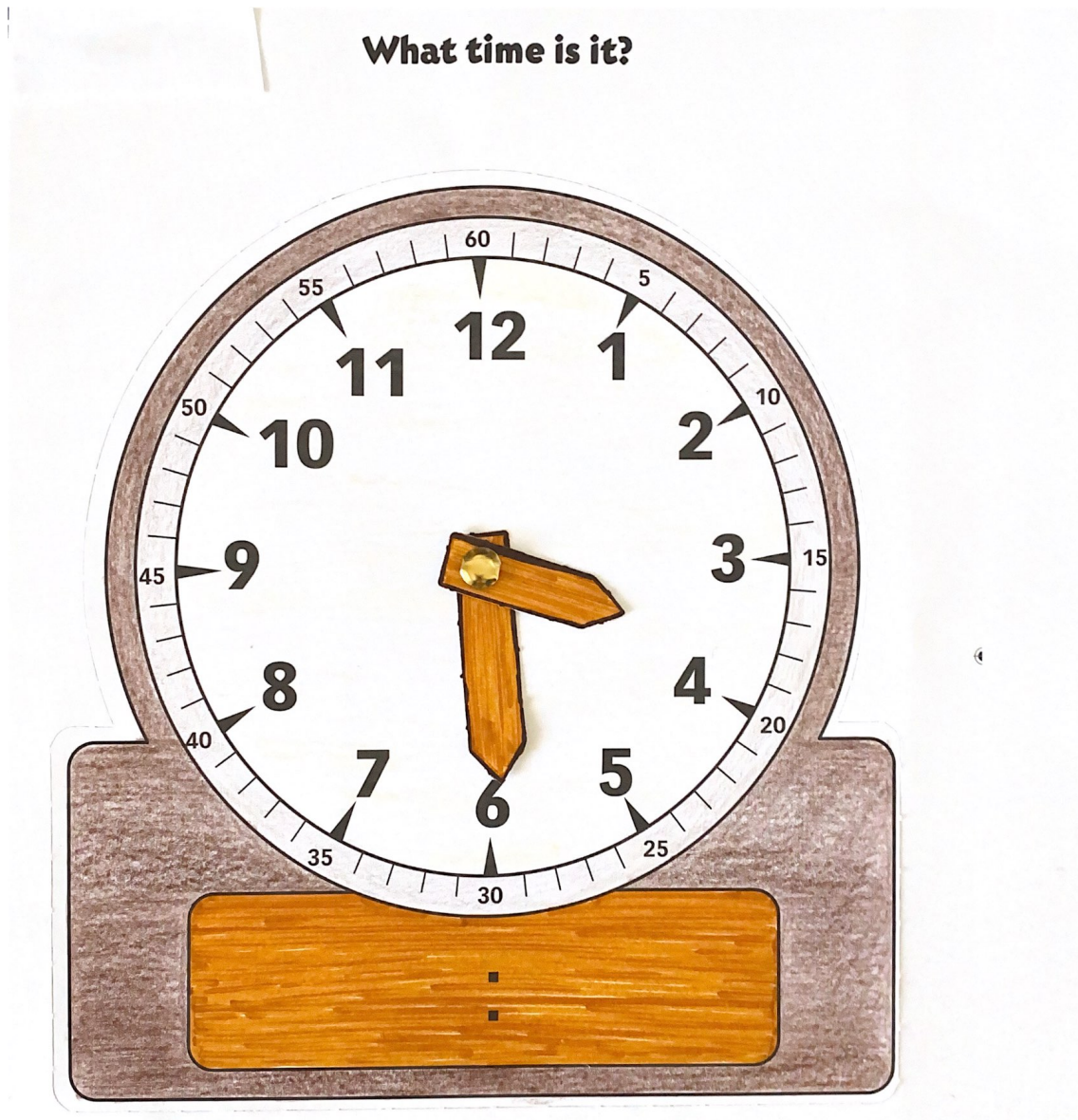
Boardgame

Roll the dice and play.



Appendix H: Structured assessment task 5

Asking and answering the time.



Appendix I: Structured assessment task 6

Animal pelmanism



Appendix J: Structured assessment task 7

Guess the animal



Appendix K: My turn! Your turn! sign



Appendix L: Task Observation Grid































Class: _____ . Tasks (T).

(* Student's name)

Focus	Level	*								*							
		T 1	T 2	T 3	T 4	T 5	T 6	T 7	T 8	T 1	T 2	T 3	T 4	T 5	T 6	T 7	T 8
Fluency	Frequent and long pauses cause difficulties in communicating.																
	Communicates even though there are some long pauses.																
	Communicates effectively without long pauses.																
Task achievement	Had difficulties in carrying out the task.																
	Carried out the task but with some difficulty.																
	Carried out the task successfully and with some ease.																
Pronunciation	Pronunciation makes comprehension difficult.																
	Acceptable easily comprehensible pronunciation.																
	Very good pronunciation.																
Vocabulary	Difficulties in using correct vocabulary.																
	Doesn't use correct vocabulary consistently throughout the task.																
	Uses correct vocabulary.																
Structures	Insufficient or inappropriate use of structures causing difficulties in communication.																
	Some difficulties in using appropriate structures causing difficulties in communication.																
	Appropriate use of structures.																
Discourse Management	Difficulties in initiating interaction and in responding and taking turns.																
	Occasionally initiates interaction and responds promptly and taking turns.																
	Initiates interaction and responds promptly and taking turns.																
Overall comments																	
Action suggested																	
Teacher's signature																	

Adapted from: Ioannou-Georgiou, S., & Pavlou, P. (2009). *Assessing young learners*. Oxford:OU

Appendix M: Questionnaire 1 & Questionnaire 2

Name _____	Class _____	Date _____	
I like:			
learning English			
my books			
watching videos			
listening to cassettes			
singing songs			
oral tasks			
playing games			
learning about other people			
reading stories			

Adapted from: Ioannou-Georgiou, S., & Pavlou, P. (2009). *Assessing young learners*. Oxford:OUP.