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Chapter 8

Looking Into Foreign Languages and Multimodal Creativity as a Tool for Pedagogical Innovation in Higher Education: The JASM Project – Open Window Onto the World

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ABSTRACT

The innovation of pedagogical practices is a challenge currently faced by higher education, in which the student is the main actor in the learning process. The aim of this project is to develop collaborative work, using multimodality in communication, adapted to the professional context, as a strategy to foster the learning of foreign languages. The JASM project ([Janela aberta sobre o mundo]. Open Window onto

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the World: Foreign Languages, Multimodal Creativity and Pedagogical Innovation in Higher Education), developed by a multidisciplinary team, rests upon an active learning dynamic based on projects, through the creation of digital narratives focused on the linguistic and cultural diversity of a city in Beira Alta, Viseu. The use of several action-research approaches allowed students of the undergraduate course in media studies at the School of Education in Viseu to develop a multilingual and multicultural awareness, in a creative, collaborative, and interdisciplinary environment.

INTRODUCTION

The learning of foreign languages (FL) in higher education (HE), particularly when the study areas are not focused on languages, depends, among other factors, on students' motivation to develop communicative and intercultural skills, essential to their entry into the labour market. Although motivation is crucial for effective learning (Oliveira, 2017), it is a challenge, in a short period of time, to motivate students from different cultural and knowledge fields.

Besides this challenge, the teaching of FL in HE needs to renew its practices, both due to the rapid growth of worldwide improvements and to the need to facilitate student integration in society and in the work space, through the increase of motivational patterns and of student success (European Union, 2015; OECD, 2020).

BACKGROUND

Active Learning In He And Pedagogical Activation

According to Wallis (2021), aspiring media workers need to be prepared for the changing nature of media work, therefore they need the skills to adapt to a career over time and be a flexible workforce. Higher education needs to prepare students for the established industry practices and the shifting and evolving nature of media employment. For such, education needs to improve “graduate capital” (human capital; social capital; cultural capital; psychological capital and identity capital) (Wallis, 2021). This means that students need skills, they need to interact with others, have networking abilities, understand the cultural aspects of the work environment and position themselves in the job market to have “career readiness” (Wallis, 2021).

In this sense, the active learning approach to teaching and learning, which is student-centred, is sought as the basis for the current research as a means to prepare students with both theoretical knowledge and practical adequacy to media employment.

Active learning, as a student-centered process, implies the reorganization of activities and relationships among the stakeholders. When combined with digital tools, it has greater potential in promoting students' autonomy and the self-regulation of progress (Mendonça, 2019).

Some authors have shown that active learning pedagogy allows for pedagogical activation (De Clercq, 2020) by deeply involving students in their own learning process, through the management and encouragement of multiple interactions within contextualized activities. In fact, active learning favors cognitive activation: from an understanding of the process to the relationship between acquired knowledge and

previous experiences, and the experiment of critical thinking, the student evolves through several stages (passive, active, constructive and interactive) (Chi, 2009; Menekşe, 2012; Chi & Wylie, 2014).

Unlike the “passive” learning stage, where the student is guided and receives information from the available materials, active learning implies students’ participation and responsibility for their own learning, as they must establish connections among ideas, analyse, synthesise and evaluate (Gogus, 2012).

In the constructive stage, the student is active, organizing and participating in activities that lead to the production of knowledge beyond the available materials. In the interactive process, the student, in addition to being active and constructive, gets involved in order to develop knowledge, engaging with other students, and ultimately enriching the process through sharing and co-construction assignments (Menekşe, 2012).

Thus, the four stages mentioned can be described considering the type of student involvement, using words such as receiving, manipulating, generating, and spoken interaction (Chi & Wylie, 2014).

In fact, associating and structuring ideas in a complex mental organisation, with the development of cognitive skills and assuming a reflective attitude have proved to be effective strategies for pedagogical activation (Kyriakides, Christoforou & Charalambous, 2013; Normand, 2017).

It is possible to identify several research works that connect pedagogical activation with success of learning and the commitment of the various actors involved. The most used strategies in this context are the dynamics of working in small groups, in a collaborative, stimulating and interactive environment, privileging feedback and developing work for a clearly stated purpose, of a practical nature.

Several variables influence student performance in HE, such as interaction during the learning process and stimulation through meaningful learning based on demanding tasks, among others. According to Schneider and Preckel (2017) and Deslauriers et al. (2019) these aspects help develop greater autonomy and higher awareness of study strategies to adopt in different situations. Other authors also report that effective active learning methodologies, which use both intellectual and emotional approaches, provide better emotional and social balance and, consequently, better academic outcomes (Hood et al., 2020; Yannier et al., 2021).

Project-Based Learning, Flteaching In HE, And Digital Tools

Active-learning pedagogies and student-centred processes encompass the project-based learning method, which allows students to work on real problems in a collaborative context, discussing issues, embracing challenges, and searching for solutions. Thus, students become the center of the learning process (de Queiroz Neto & Vasconcelos, 2021). Project-based learning should lead to specific levels of achievement, combined with the development of digital skills, a creative mindset, and the development of a willingness to improve participation and collaboration skills. It also aims at interdisciplinarity (Springer, 2018), a key success factor in FL learning (Altarriba & Kazanas, 2016). As for multimedia and digital technologies, these allow for creating learning dynamics conducive to developing skills in creative environments (Delplancq et al., 2018; Costa et al., 2021).

Project-based learning, applied to FL teaching in HE, is undoubtedly an excellent approach to improve skills and, consequently, student performance (Zhurat, Davydzuc & Oliynyk, 2019; Cardoso & Chagas, 2020). It develops functional skills consistent with the technological evolution characteristic of the 21st century. These functional skills are duly recognized as crucial for HE students: higher-order thinking, problem-solving, autonomy, communication, and collaboration (Sinnayah, Rathner, Loton, Klein & Hartley, 2019). All these skills are mobilized when using a FL: in relevant linguistic and cultural con-

texts where the FL is needed, students will naturally practice interpersonal communication; motivation will increase in a creative, communicative process in an interplay of constructive interactions associated with an emotional component in learning (Jaleniauskiene, 2016). These parameters are of particular interest in the development of communicative competence. This complex didactic notion depends on the knowledge of various language skills at the written and oral levels. Therefore, communication in FL appears crucial for the development of a project that requires the mobilization of other skills (intercultural, multimodal, social).

As stated in the European University Association Survey report (Gaebel et al., 2021), most European HE institutions believe in the benefits of digital tools for their students to boost teaching and learning. This guiding document considers associating digital tools with their practices as a strategic priority, which will enable greater flexibility regarding the learning process and require reconsidering working methods.

New technologies and students with new skills (digital natives) are at the origin of new paradigms in the teaching-learning process. The combination of teaching with digital skills has developed new working spaces, new methodologies, and led to new questions concerning student performance (Araújo, 2010). The most used digital tools in the classroom are the computer, associated software, cell phones, apps, and virtual learning environments (Silva et al., 2014). The work environment provided is generally safe and motivating for the students, positively impacting their performance.

The use of technology to enhance student performance is ubiquitous in today's educational settings, as it also happens with project-based learning (Amante et al., 2021). Several studies have provided unequivocal evidence that new technologies have a profound impact on the way teachers teach and students co-construct their knowledge, and in the field of FL there are numerous advantages in the use of digital tools, namely digital storytelling platforms, as Pardo (2014), Kasami (2018), Hava (2019) and, among many other scholars, Ramírez-Verdugo & Vega (2021) point out. Digital storytelling allows for telling stories through various digital media, "... such as images, videos, sounds and texts" (Peñalba, Samaniego & Romero, 2020). In 2017, Rahimi and Yadollahi showed that working with online digital storytelling platforms improves communication skills in English as a FL: students spent more time on collaborative work online than on more traditional approaches. Other studies report the benefits of storytelling on student performances in FL (Hwang et al., 2016). The findings point to a significant improvement in written and oral skills, motivation, and critical thinking. Yet, as Cuesta et al. (2021) argue, "... many teachers (...) still do not take advantage of the digital storytelling strategy or do not even know about its use and benefits" and that is the reason why projects such as JASM contribute to shed light on these innovative pedagogical practices.

Multimodal supports, in addition to being extremely accessible, are very diversified. Therefore, choosing the right tools in view of the target audience, learning objectives and working conditions can become a challenge (Lebrun & Lacelle, 2013). Digital resources must make it possible to work on the linguistic, but also on the cultural and social aspects of the FL. Such resources should also allow for new experiences on the part of the student, by using the FL and lead them to a new standpoint with respect to other cultures (Santos & Ferreira, 2020).

From among the multimodal supports, the Korsakow platform was created for journalists, filmmakers, artists, etc., with the aim of providing an editing system for the construction of interactive multilinear films for the web. Its basic structure allows one to organise text, photography, video and sound from a database and trace visualisation sequences that can change dynamically depending on the user/viewer's choices. Therefore, the constructive process of a K-film requires a non-hierarchical way of thinking that favors an open branching scheme, in line with the unfolding of the narrative and allowing for an accep-

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tance of multiple outcomes. It is a powerful digital tool that puts together the various means, languages and elements of the story to construct an original, flexible and creative narrative, “rich in implicatures and presuppositions”, which directs speech towards countless meaning effects, where “the report is not a mere representation of life, but a communicative act filled with illocutionary force”, characteristic of the communication action theory (Motta, 2017).

Constructive interactions and cooperation imply a change in the teacher’s role: this gives students greater freedom to structure their paths, seek the most relevant resources and ways to interact properly. Such a change fosters observation, questioning, encouragement, guidance and facilitates the learning-process (Normand, 2017). The teacher provides conditions for the acquisition of student autonomy, but, even if no longer a sage on the stage h/she remains as guide on the side.

THE JASM PROJECT

The JASM project (Open Window onto the World: Foreign Languages, Multimodal Creativity and Innovation in Higher Education) aimed to develop an active and innovative pedagogical experience in the context of foreign language teaching/learning. The project was developed with undergraduate students attending the Media Studies bachelor’s degree course at the Higher School of Education of Viseu - ESEV (Portugal), and involved two FL: French and English. The project encompassed activities aimed to deepen the cognitive (multilingual and multicultural), aesthetic and emotional dimensions of language teaching and learning, combining multimodal communication and artistic creativity and involved the establishment of bridges with local immigrant communities. The project allowed a group of students, under the guidance of professors from various scientific areas, to discover the intercultural and linguistic richness of the city of Viseu, meet immigrants, mobilise various skills and knowledge acquired in FL in interconnection with other curricular units which are essential for the training of Media Studies professionals, in order that students might be able to put into practice the creative talents acquired over 3 academic semesters.

Framework

The JASM project consists of a teaching-learning experience of FL (French and English) at HE in Portugal, having as its general theme the encounter with linguistic and cultural diversity of a city in Beira Alta, Viseu. It is based on the principles of active learning, through a project, ensuring that students hold a central role, involving them in a collaborative and interdisciplinary work environment, with the use of digital tools.

The stimuli to learning can be social, cultural and artistic. Among the main skills used during the project, the linguistic, communicative, intercultural, social, digital, creative, analytical, critical and reflective ones should be highlighted. The development and improvement of these skills, closely interconnected within this project, clearly account for the consolidation of communicative skills.

The students (20), who volunteered to participate in the project, were enrolled in the 1st year of the undergraduate course in Media Studies at the School of Education in Viseu. The experiment took place over three semesters (from the 2nd semester of the 2018-19 academic year until the end of the 2nd semester of 2019-20). The remaining students of the class (10 students) followed the usual methodology proposed in the curricular units, essentially focused on oral comprehension, oral production and also

written production and reading comprehension, aspects that were evaluated through individual written assignments, a group assignment assessed in writing and orally and a written test.

The Media Studies course aims to train professionals for the media and its curricular characteristics are to offer compulsory training in FL with 12 ECTS, which can be complemented with an option of 4 ECTS, over the four semesters of the first two years of the course.

The plan of studies also includes curricular units which provide training in photography, digital arts and intercultural communication. Professional opportunities include journalism, production, organization and management of information, institutional, internal and organizational communication.

Following the effects of the pandemic crisis that occurred in 2020, the project had to be adjusted to align with externally imposed teaching and learning methods that relied on distance learning.

METHODOLOGY

Regarding methodology, besides the imperative for the project to adapt to inevitable experimental shifts, as well as to the suggestions arising from student participation and the contingencies encountered along the way, the following criteria should be highlighted:

- consistency of the methodology grounded on the principles of pedagogical activation in project-based learning: selection of a set of activities and definition of the teaching and learning process centered on the student and aiming at the development of his/her competencies in an integrated and meaningful way, according to his/her professional and personal objectives;
- implementation of an active, collaborative and productive working environment, in which students can engage in a creative and stimulating dialogue with their peers and with teachers, using appropriate digital media;
- definition of a timely, cross-curricular, challenging, and hands-on topic, which entailed sustained work, within the set deadline, and which appealed to the students, bringing them together, developing cross-cutting competencies and triggering complex cognitive processes;
- selection of the type of output material and the production layouts, with a view to being up-to-date and dynamic, looking ahead to the future profession.

Therefore, and abiding by the prerequisites of project-based active learning, this involved the definition of several benchmarks, namely: selection of the course and the experimental timeline with students;

- definition of the topic, previously negotiated with the students, towards a practical end which holds out the prospect of cutting-edge products that may be extensively disseminated among the target community;
- setting up the experimental group of (20) students and their respective subgroups (four members each); setting up the control group of students (traditional methodology);
- presentation of the project in a seminar directed to students and teachers;
- assessment of all students' proficiency levels in spoken and written comprehension and production of FL, by means of a series of tests in French and in English. The tests were designed based on the CEFR levels and inspired by the DELF, DALF and TOEFL examinations. The response

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time was monitored for each set of competencies. The average level in English was B2 whereas in written French the level was B2 and A2 for spoken French.

The students were presented with the challenge of creating the life story of immigrants of different nationalities living in Viseu. This was done based on the storytelling methodology and using several digital tools.

The initial activities included researching and gathering information about the different nationalities in the region of Viseu, based on statistical data collected from the Portuguese Immigration and Border Service, as well as about their countries, cultures and widely spread stereotypes concerning the nationalities at issue. Each group of students chose one nationality: Angolan, Belarusian, Indian, Italian and Ukrainian. This was followed by oral and written presentations of their work, both in French and in English, using ICT and interactive resources.

In preparation for the work ahead, the whole class participated in a seminar on photography, organized and led by a member of the JASM team who is a professor with expertise in digital art, and learnt technical vocabulary associated with photojournalism. Social networks made it possible to contact migrants and, in some cases, the contact information was also provided by the Local Support Centre for Migrant Integration, after prior agreement from those who would become participants and after obtaining their informed consent.

The meetings were held face-to-face for as long as the pandemic conditions allowed, and virtually during the lockdown. After framing the project and requesting permission to publish the collected material, the students interviewed the immigrants and asked them about their life stories and traditions. Concurrently, they took photographs of the interviewees *in loco* and of traditional objects they had brought from their home countries (Fig. 1), as an extension of memory. These were also used as study objects in both of the FL and presented according to the same set of standards as explained above.

The focus was then placed on the most relevant details of the interviewees' personalities and their life stories. The interplay of these aspects with immaterial traditions, and their association with traditional objects, allowed the students to develop narratives that resulted in short films made by the students themselves, with the inevitable creative idiosyncrasies of documentary journalism. Afterwards, another open seminar on the Korsakow 6 system and its representational prerogatives was also offered by the professor and specialist in digital tools. These tools allowed the students to present the outcomes of their work, showing their creativity, in terms of storytelling and design.

RESULTS

The mid-term evaluation was carried out qualitatively. The debate with the whole class resulted in greater motivation and commitment of the students in the experimental group, despite the fact that the workload surpassed that of the traditional/control group.

It was also found that the experimental group had an extremely fruitful alignment of ideas, stressing the willingness to continue the work. At the same time, the group expressed that contact with immigrants, besides being exciting, was very enriching. Even though they acknowledged the assets of this methodology, the remaining students retained their more classic view of learning and assessment and of a more guided learning process.

Figure 1. Example of realia



After the end of the experimental phase, and due to physical distancing imposed by the pandemic, the final evaluation also followed the qualitative model. The students involved in the project underlined their interest in the adopted methodology. They shared tasks naturally and without conflict. Therefore, they appreciated the use and integration of the skills acquired during the training period and the activities developed during field work, intended for specific purposes, in a broader, realistic context. As far as FL is concerned, they claimed to have managed to improve writing skills and, above all, oral production, a factor confirmed by the foreign language teachers during the evaluation of the various student performances. One of the curious suggestions put forward by the students was the interest in replicating the project, ensuring even more room for creativity. The students, who did not participate in these assignments, stated that they had a great interest in following the evolution, keeping, however, within the scope of the traditional methodology. The results of the final evaluation, in the usual components, were higher for the students of the experimental group, when compared with the control group.

The evaluation accomplished by the FL teachers was also extremely satisfying. There was a significant change in the learning dynamics with very committed, interested, always available, involved, more autonomous, creative students with an effective aim to learn and to carry out quality work.

The implemented methodology requires more support work, availability, individualized interactions, as well as greater flexibility to adapt quickly to the needs and circumstances, both on the part of students and teachers.

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To gather and disseminate all the accomplished work, a project website was created (<https://www.esev.ipv.pt/jasm/>), displaying a K film put together relying on the Korsakow system (<https://www.esev.ipv.pt/jasm/?divulgation>), resulting from the project-based learning process, developed by the students throughout the project. In addition, the team has also organized a photo exhibition and is currently working on an e-book.

CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

The pedagogical experience of FL teaching-learning, reported in this article, intends to show that in HE project learning constitutes a real pedagogical asset for students of courses whose training is not specifically reliant on FL and, undoubtedly, offers a valid alternative to traditional methods.

Language skills combined with cultural and intercultural skills were taught in an integrated way with transversal skills, vital for competitive citizens, to prepare for the job market. The strategies outlined, together with students, ensured the acquisition of autonomy, creativity, reasoning, critical thinking and greater responsibility in the learning process. They also promoted diverse abilities, namely in terms of communication, inherent to the elaboration and exhibition of work with consequent visible repercussions among the community.

The use of multiple educational resources, namely digital tools, suited to the structural nature of the project, contributed to the renewal of practices and learner motivation. There was an increase in commitment, curiosity, student protagonism and, consequently, an improvement in performances.

The role of the teacher, as a result, has evolved: (s)he has undergone a transition from central actor to a mentor, a learning process mentor, with more availability and more flexibility to provide collaboration, despite the pandemic crisis having driven the transition from blended to distance learning, in synchronous and asynchronous alternation.

This project also included a social dimension of FL, favoring communication, awareness and the experience of participation in authentic intercultural contexts. Linguistic knowledge was intertwined with cultural and social knowledge within the communicative process. Students were then social actors, able to fulfill tasks beyond linguistics, using transversal skills, which are essential throughout their lives.

The encouraging results achieved provide the necessary impetus to promote a new study, more comprehensive and with more students, adjusted to a quantitative assessment of the evolution of the language level of the experimental group in relation to the control group, having as a reference even more openness in relation to the project theme and working with professionals outside the academic environment, eventually potential employers.

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The screenshots illustrate the database's search capabilities and content structure. The top image shows a search interface with a sidebar for navigation and a main results area. The middle image displays a full-text chapter with a table of contents and front matter. The bottom image shows a detailed table of contents for a book, listing various chapters and their authors.

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