

Spanish language teaching practices during Celuffs: a look at the curricularization of extension.

Práticas de ensino de língua espanhola durante o Celuffs: um olhar sobre a curricularização da extensão



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RESUMO

Este relato visa descrever as experiências obtidas durante o programa de extensão do Centro de ensino de línguas da Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul (Celuffs), que objetiva promover o ensino de línguas para estudantes da universidade e comunidade externa. Relatamos nossa experiência como professoras bolsistas durante o curso de conversação em língua espanhola utilizando contos de Horacio Quiroga e como essa prática se mostrou eficaz no processo de ensino e aprendizagem dos estudantes. Outra experiência que acreditamos ser relevante a ser relatada, foi a que tivemos ao ministrar aulas de maneira lúdica para alunos do 3º ano do ensino infantil e como isso agregou em nossa formação. Ademais, abordar a importância do programa para a formação dos professores de línguas e como esse programa de extensão corrobora com o crescimento pessoal e profissional dos alunos e dos ministrantes do curso. A partir disso percebemos a relevância das práticas interativas no ensino de línguas e também da curricularização da extensão no ensino superior como forma de fomentar uma integração benéfica entre universidade e comunidade externa bem como uma formação mais completa dos futuros professores aliando as teorias aprendidas na universidade com a prática em sala de aula.

Palavras-chave: Ensino. Espanhol. Extensão.

ABSTRACT

This report aims to describe the experiences obtained during the extension program of the Language Teaching Center of the Federal University of the Southern Frontier (Celuffs), which aims to promote language teaching for university students and the external community. We report our experience as a scholarship teachers during the Spanish conversation course using stories by Horacio Quiroga and how this practice proved to be effective in the teaching and learning process of the students. Another experience that we believe is relevant to be reported is the one we had while teaching classes in a playful manner to 3rd-grade students in kindergarten and how this contributed to our education. Furthermore, we address the importance of the program for the training of language teachers and how this extension program contributes to the personal and professional growth of both students and course instructors. Additionally, we bring to light a perspective on the curricularization of extension in higher education and how this can foster beneficial integration between the university and the external community. From this we see the relevance of interactive practices in language teaching and also the curricularization of extension in higher education as a way of fostering a beneficial integration

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between the university and the external community as well as a more complete training of future teachers, combining the theories learned at the university with practice in the classroom.

Keywords: Teaching. Spanish. Extension.

INTRODUCTION

This report aims to address the activities carried out in the Spanish language offered in the extension project of the Language Teaching Center of the Federal University of Southern Frontier (Cellufs) and their importance for teaching training. During the period described in this report, the project was aimed at teaching Spanish and Portuguese as an additional language. However, we will focus here only on the Spanish teaching, as this is the language in which we actively participated. More specifically, we will focus on our experiences in conversation courses and in early childhood education in Spanish.

Cellufs is an extension program of UFFS that aims to democratize language teaching by offering free language courses to the community, in addition to contributing to the training of students who participate as volunteers or program scholarship holder, as it adds a rich experience in the teaching and learning of Spanish for these students, who can be from any university course, as long as they have advanced knowledge of a language. The entire process is coordinated by the professors responsible for the extension program.

We participate in the program as students and later as scholarship teachers of Spanish, while we were undergraduate students. In this report, we will discuss how the program benefited our learning. To do so, we will talk about our experience in one of the courses taught in the program and how we developed some teaching practices using short stories by the writer Horacio Quiroga (1878-1937), as well as an immersion we had when visiting a preschool, promoting playful Spanish language teaching activities for a 3rd-grade class.

Thus, we will address these issues by adding a note on the relevance of incorporating university extension programs into the curriculum as a way of leveraging the knowledge who are involved with the community is general, so that both parties benefit from this exchange.

We also reflect on how teaching processes can occur through play and interaction, as we start from the concept of language as a form of social interaction and how this way of seeing language can build new ways of reflecting on the process of teaching and learning Spanish.

METHODS

When entering university, a common concern among undergraduate students is how to acquire practical teaching experience before graduating. In this sense, extension projects are important, as they are defined as an interdisciplinary educational process that promotes interaction and coordination between the university and the community in which it is located through different activities aimed at disseminating knowledge (Pneu, 2012). Thus, these projects make it possible to include practical activities, adding the theoretical knowledge learned during undergraduate classes, making teacher training more complete and rewarding.

In this report, we share our experience as participants in the extension program entitled “Language Teaching Center of the Federal University of Southern Frontier (Cellufs),” and its importance for our comprehensive training as teachers. This project, which aims to offer free language courses, allowed us to work as volunteers teachers and later as scholarships recipients for the Spanish language. During 2022 and 2023, the program began to offer a course focused on Spanish conversation, based on the demand perceived by the team.

In this course, the target audience was members of the community inside and outside the University, who were aged 15 or older. Thus, the class was mainly composed of university students, technicians, and other members of the community, most of whom were adults. In this context, we were prompted to think about the best ways to stimulate oral communication in these groups.

Based on this, we developed the course using literary short stories as a starting point for discussion in Spanish, since this would allow students to work on their reading comprehension and vocabulary by reading the stories and then discussing them in class.

The course consisted of twelve two-hour sessions. The theme of each class was based on the stories in the book “Cuentos de la selva” by Horacio Quiroga, a regional writer who, despite being Uruguayan, lived for a long time in the jungle of Misiones, a region that borders our university campus, allowing students to identify characteristics of the local fauna, flora, and culture.

The book “Cuentos de la selva”, published in 1918, is considered a book of short stories for children and young adults, featuring simple language and characters with whom readers can easily identify. However, other authors such as Sousa (1985) highlight the complexity present beneath the “simple” exterior of Quiroga’s narratives:

Más que todo el universo narrado de Horacio Quiroga quiere denunciar fragmentariamente -son ocho cuentos -la amenaza a la vida en la tierra, la violación del equilibrio ecológico. Y así cuestionar si son los animales víctimas de las leyes naturales o si es el hombre quien tiene la culpa. (Sousa, 1985, p.125)

Similarly, Quiroga's short stories were chosen as the starting point for the classroom discussions because of the everyday themes they address which readers can easily identify with, therefore stimulating and facilitating students' Spanish language skills throughout the lessons. In addition, one of our concerns was also to present cultural aspects of Spanish-speaking countries through both lexical aspects and customs, beliefs, and history. In this sense, Quiroga's short stories proved to be a good option, as they bring a wealth of cultural aspects characteristics of Uruguay and the River Plate region as a whole:

[...] We can observe this same space of barbaric men, gauchos, and farm workers in various characters highlighted by the writer in this anthology, who live in constant struggle with the wild nature that surrounds them and causes changes in their own human nature, mainly located in the northern region (jungle/chaco) of Argentina. (Soares, 2017, p.26, own translation).

Furthermore, by placing us in front of such a diverse audience, this outreach activity made us think about which materials would be most appropriate because, as Isabel Santos Gargallo (1999, p.79) argues: "[...] It is important that teaching materials be flexible enough to be adapted to the teaching context in which we find ourselves." Thus, well-chosen material, considering the needs of each group of student/classes, is important for students to be able to explore their full potential in the classroom.

Therefore, these texts were chosen as course guides primarily because of the brevity of this literary genre (short stories), which allows stories to be read more quickly, enabling new discussions to be held each week. In addition, the close relationship between literature and culture was also taken into account. As Jesús Sánchez Lobato points out:

La lengua es siempre espejo de la cultura y de las formas de vida de la colectividad que la habla. Es, por tanto, en este sentido, un ser proclive al cambio -si bien con mucha más lentitud que cualquier otra manifestación cultural-, que se adapta con facilidad al entorno, y que nombra las relaciones sociales y culturales establecidas de acuerdo con la época y sus diversos usuarios [...] (Lobato, p.8, 1999)

Therefore, it is possible to study a language without considering the culture of the society that speaks it. In this sense, we can say that using literature to complement language teaching is very interesting, as it can pave the way for vocabulary learning, in addition to promoting debate on the themes addressed in the stories. Regarding the use of literature in language teaching, we observe that:

Literature, in its broadest sense (poems, short stories, novels, or plays), is a very interesting tool for teaching a second language that shares several formal and cultural characteristics with the first. In addition to comparative work at basic levels (phonetic, grammatical, and lexical), literature allows for the acquisition of information related to cultural practices, fictional universes, and figures of speech, and is a more original and stimulating way to practice the four skills. Furthermore, the use of literary genres can spark students' interest in expressing their subjectivity and promoting their creativity. (Sánchez, 2012, p. 137, own translation).

From this, we observe the importance of teaching language using authentic material, that is, material that does not have a pedagogical purpose, but is “real” material that is part of students’ lives (Andrijevic, 2010). These materials, which included literary texts rich in content and culture, prove to be very effective in teaching a new language, as they contain, in their simplest form, crucial elements of the language in question. In this regard, we can say that literature and language are inseparable, as we see in:

No podía ser de otro modo: la realidad básica y determinante de una literatura es la lengua. Es una realidad irreductible a otras realidades y conceptos, sean estos históricos, étnicos, políticos o religiosos (Paz, 1981, p. 24).

This shows that teaching language using literature brings with it the “essence” of that language, making it an important tool for immersing students in the history, culture, and reality of the language.

Below, we will show images of some material used in some classes, which helped us to make conversation practices more dynamic. The material was created on the Canva editing platform and was used in more expository classes to stimulate debate. The stories were made available during the week for them to read, and during the face-to-face meeting, conversation practice took place. The meetings were both expository and in the form of a conversation circle.

Figure 1- Didatic material



Source: the author (2023).

Figure 2 – Didatic material



Source: the author (2023).

Figura 3 – Short-story



Source: the author (2023).

Figura 4 – Conversation circle



Source: the author (2023).

In addition to this experience, we can also report on the period in which we taught recreational activities, such as workshops, to a third-grade class in a public school in the city of Realeza.

This experience arose from a conversation between the school's administration and Celuff's coordination, where the need to provide greater contact with the Spanish language for students was identified, considering the context of the borders with Spanish-speaking countries in which they live. Once a week, during the second semester of 2019, we developed interactive activities with this class based on playful approaches to the Spanish language, such as games, songs, movies, and cartoons. In this sense, we can mention the use of poem and songs by Argentine writer María Elena Walsh, well known for her work in children's literature, "La obra de María Elena Walsh marcó un hito incuestionable en la literatura infantil para chicos" (Aracri, 2010, p. 141).

The intention was for students to learn Spanish in an enjoyable and entertaining way. To this end, many of the activities focused on learning new words, associating their knowledge of the world from a new perspective in Spanish. An example of this is the name of the animals in Spanish: *perro* (dog), *gato* (cat), *porco* (pig), *gallina* (chicken), and so on. Work with vocabulary was usually associated with games, music, drawings, and poems from the culture of Spanish-speaking countries. As an example, we cite María Elena Walsh's poem-song. "El reino al revés" (2005), which addresses the lexicon of animals in a creative and original way, as we can see in the verses: "Me dijeron que en el Reino del Revés/Nada el pájaro y vuela el pez/Que los gatos no hacen miau y dicen yes/Porque estudian mucho inglés" (They told me that in the Kingdom of Reversal/The bird swim and the fish flies/The cats don't meow and say yes/Because they study English a lot).

During the process, the students were always very curious and attentive to the activities. As it was in an elementary school class, we had to adapt our activities whenever we encountered difficulties, such as the pronunciation of certain words. For this reason, we also respected the details of teaching through playfulness.

One of the objectives of play is help children/adolescents perform better in their learning through fun and recreational classes, so that they achieve satisfactory learning outcomes while respecting the characteristic and wishes of the students (Mello, 2017, p. 19, own translation).

With this, we aim to present the language in a fun and welcoming way in order to promote a learning experience for these students. Regarding teaching language in a playful way, we observe that "The more playful the Spanish language classes are, the greater the student's interest in participating, enabling an innovative practice that makes the content enjoyable" (Silva, 2018, p. 13).

Below are some images of the activities carried out at the preschool.

Figure 5 – Playfulness activities



Source: Author. (2019)

Figure 6 - Playfulness activities



Source: Author. (2019)

Figura 7 - Exposition



Source: Author. (2019)

Therefore, we chose these among several other experiences gained throughout our participation in the extension project because we believe they are diverse enough to understand the magnitude of the program.

These opportunities have added significant learning to our education, and we can see the results of this nowadays, after graduation, as it has enriched our personal and professional lives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By using Quiroga's literature, we notice a remarkable improvement in the students' vocabulary, which enabled them to communicate more fluently and express their opinions on the topic with more confidence, as they became more participatory during classes. At the end of the course, we were surprised by the students' fluency in communicating in Spanish.

Regarding the 3rd-year students in early childhood education, we noticed, throughout the meetings, more active participation in the proposed activities, as they were more relaxed and curious about what they would learn and what "games" we would play with them. In the end, we can say that it was a rich and welcoming experience. Dealing with students from another area of learning and with such a need for attention and care was unique and worthy of inclusion in this report.

In addition to the significant improvement in student learning, we, as teachers, noticed an improvement in our perspective as language teachers. We saw in practice that teaching foreign language through literature and playful activities can be methodologies that facilitate the learning process. Furthermore, we began to adopt a different approach towards our students, with greater confidence in the topics covered and more resourceful when teaching classes. During the process, we were always committed to learning more and more in order to teach, becoming active in our teaching-learning process, which later proved to be a unique experience in our training.

In this way, we can say that this practice, promoted by the Language Teaching Center of the Federal University of the Southern Frontiers (Celuffs), was of great importance in the training of these students, who will later be teaching Spanish language classes, promoting quality training and education. In addition to the practice at school, this proved the effectiveness of integration between the university and the community.

In consequence, we observe the relevance of university extension programs, especially Caluffs, with which we share our experiences in this report. Similarly, we emphasize the importance of valuing these programs so that they can be increasingly promoted in Brazilian universities, given their important role in the training of teachers and professionals as a whole.

In addition, we reiterate the importance of thinking about foreign language teaching as conceived based on interactions and classroom practices. These interactive classroom practices, carried out with the teacher's mediation, promote significant improvements in learning.

It is up to the teacher to seek and enrich their classroom dynamics with activities that allow integration of knowledge with practical actions, and above all to motivate students not only in terms of learning required by law, but also in the acquisition of a foreign language. (Brutti; et al., 2015, p.5)

In this way, we observe that dynamic that stimulates interaction and cooperation in the classroom, promoting teaching in a playful manner, make students increasingly interested in learning the language.

It is worth noting that these reflections on different concepts and forms of teaching and their subsequent application in the classroom were made possible because of the extension program to which we were linked, which provided us with this experience. Regarding the relevance of the extension, we can mention

Furthermore, extension seems like a two-way street that establishes an exchange of knowledge, a dialogue between academic and popular knowledge, theory and practice. This ensures full community participation and democratization of knowledge originating from academia (Reis; Sarti, 2022, p.77).

From this, we return to the concept of democratization and access to learning that can be promoted by universities through extension projects, fostering integration between society and the university environment.

We believe, therefore, that the circularization of extension is essential for a more construction of a democratic society and for the enhancement of the teaching-learning of students, future professionals, in their field of activity. As Pereira and Vitorini point out:

They identified the benefits of circularization extension as the possibility of articulating different areas of knowledge to solve societal issues, as well as giving students autonomy to choose the activities in which they will engage. In this sense, education becomes student-centered through the meaning that students give to their learning, their relationship with the world, and with science (Pereira; Vitorini, 2019, p.20).

We agree with this observation because we believe in the importance of active students' participation in the reaching-learning process. When students become protagonists in the process, learning starts from prior knowledge, from the concrete, and transforms into problem solving and creation that are shared with the surrounding society through outreach activities.

We emphasize here the importance of oral practice promoted by the conversation course, as it was through constant practice that it was possible to achieve such results.

Orality is important in learning a second language and cannot be left in the background. All skills are important for learning, and we understand that integration between them is necessary for learners to develop better in the target language (Ribeiro, 2019, p. 14).

Therefore, we believe that the experiences reported here will serve as examples of what extension programs have to offer to society and Brazilian universities can observe this as a way to promote teaching and draw attention to the programs, in order to show society how this relationship can be enriching for everyone.

Finally, we see the need to discuss the inclusion of extension programs in higher education curricula so that this integration can take place, and we can see more work like that described in this report.

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these programs that aim to integrate university and community, which, in our view, can only contribute to the construction of a democratic and humanitarian society.

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