

CRITICAL TASKS IN ACTION: THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TASKS DESIGNED FROM A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Leonardo da Silva¹

¹Instituto Federal de Santa Catarina, São José, SC, Brasil

Abstract

Based on the premise that teaching is a political act and that it is thus necessary to engage additional language students in the process of both linguistic and critical development (Crookes, 2013), this study aims at investigating the role of the teacher during the implementation of a cycle of tasks designed from the perspectives of the Task-based Approach (Ellis, 2003) and of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1996). According to Breen (2009), a task can be understood as a workplan which is modified and reinterpreted during its implementation. Samuda (2009) argues that one of the central roles of the teacher in task-based language teaching is to guide students in language processing so as to cater for linguistic development. In this sense, it is important to investigate the task as a process, that is, the strategies adopted by the teacher while implementing the task as a workplan. In order to do so, this study focuses on the reflexive diaries of the teacher-researcher, in which he describes and reflects upon the implementation of a critical cycle of tasks designed for a group of high school students in a Brazilian context. From the thematic analysis of the diaries, the theme 'strategies' could be identified, which demonstrates decisions that were taken by the teacher-researcher during implementation so as to: a) guarantee that the critical objective of the task would be met; b) guide the students' attention to a specific topic (such as focus on form or the critical topic at hand); c) overcome technical and material difficulties; and d) facilitate students' learning process. The complexity involved in the implementation process of tasks designed from a critical perspective suggests the need for teachers to develop their critical reflexive skills in order to be able to make decisions that will be adequate for each specific educational context.

Key-words: Role of the Teacher, Task-Based Language Teaching, Critical Pedagogy.

¹ Professor do Instituto Federal de Santa Catarina (IFSC) e Doutor pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários (UFSC) com concentração em Estudos da Linguagem. Tem experiência no ensino de língua inglesa e de português como língua estrangeira, e seus interesses incluem: a abordagem baseada em tarefas, a Pedagogia Crítica no ensino de línguas, e questões de identidade (raça, classe, gênero, sexualidade, deficiência, geração) nos campos da Literatura e da Linguística Aplicada. E-mail: leonardo.silva@ifsc.edu.br ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7346-5966>.



Introduction: teaching English critically through tasks

Teaching (and also learning) is always a political act. As Paulo Freire (1996) states, “no one can be in the world, with the world and with others in a neutral way” (p. 77). Language teachers, more specifically, teach more than linguistic structures – even if they are not consciously choosing to do so. For the Brazilian *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais* (1998), the teaching-learning process of an additional language should focus on the development of the student as a human being and as a citizen, so as to prepare him/her to act on the social world (p. 15). Because of that, the document addresses the issues of citizenship, critical consciousness, and sociopolitical aspects of learning an additional language as being paramount in this context (p. 15). These topics are also directly related to the themes that should permeate the teaching of all disciplines in regular elementary and high schools: ethics, health, environment, sexual orientation, cultural plurality, and work and consumerism (p. 44). An analysis of the document, more specifically in the section that states the objectives of primary school teaching, demonstrates a strong concern for the development of critical citizens, since it emphasizes the importance of: developing citizenship and adopting attitudes of solidarity, cooperation and rejection of injustice; adopting a critical stance with the use of dialogue to mediate conflicts; positioning oneself against any form of discrimination based on cultural differences, such as class, beliefs, gender, ethnicity or any other individual or social characteristic; understanding oneself as part of, dependent on, and a transformation agent of society, contributing to the preservation of the environment; questioning reality and proposing solutions for problems through the use of logics, creativity, intuition, and critical analysis; among others (Brasil, 1998, pp. 7-8).

Similarly, the guidelines for high school teaching in Brazil – *Orientações curriculares para o Ensino Médio* (Brasil, 2006) – emphasize the sociopolitical aspect of learning an additional language. The document highlights that learning a language should go beyond learning to communicate and focus on the development of citizenship (p. 91). Citizenship implies, in this perspective, the understanding of one’s location in society, how such location is shaped and/or constrained by society’s structures, and how one may work to change and improve one’s position (p. 91). In this sense, the document stresses the relevance of discussing how exclusion operates so as to promote critical reflection that may foster citizenship in the language classroom.

For Moita Lopes (1996), when “the language classroom is neutral from a sociopolitical view, it ignores the essential traces of language: its social nature” (p. 183, my translation). In this sense, even when one claims to be neutral, the teaching process is mostly likely reproducing and perpetuating hegemony. This seems to be the case of some contemporaneous practices, such as communicative language teaching – at least if we consider the way it has been applied in most teaching contexts (Pessoa & Urzêda-Freitas, 2012). From this perspective, the objective of language teaching is to develop the learners’ communicative competence, that is,

the ability to communicate effectively: it recognizes, therefore, the importance of using appropriate language for each communicative situation (Leffa, 1988, p. 226). In other words, language is part of a wider context. Thus, linguistic forms may be taught when necessary, but always with the objective of developing the communicative competence, which implies learning to use the language effectively in different communicative events.

Leffa (1988) also highlights that the development of strategic competence may be as important as (or even more important than) developing grammatical competence (p. 226). Because of that, classes planned under the premises of the communicative approach make use of contextualized and authentic materials (including different textual genres) and they emphasize one or more of the four linguistic skills (Leffa, 1988, p. 227). While this approach seems to be very appropriate if we consider that teaching should have an impact on the students' real lives – since real language and communication itself are the focus of the process –, its operationalization often ignores sociopolitical issues that are embedded in any communicative event. Furthermore, “communicative approaches often seem to concern themselves with basically a middle-class, potentially internationally-mobile individual in mind” (Crookes, 2010, p. 9). It is not uncommon, for instance, to come across textbooks following a communicative approach that present a “perfect world” without questioning how power and oppression operate in our society. Actually, as Bernstein et al (2015) explain, language learning in general has “become both a target and an instrument of neoliberalization” (p. 6). Under neoliberalism, which can be understood as the discourse of the marketplace, language is a merely technicized skill, culture is a commodity to be sold through stereotyping and essentialization, language teachers are technical workers in the strict sense (who can be easily trained and replaced), and language learners are seen as consumers and entrepreneurs (Bernstein et al, 2015).

This can be considered problematic in the sense that, if we are to think of the teacher's role as being twofold – that is, developing communicative competence but also critical thinking –, there seems to be a need to question some of the current teaching practices and the ideologies behind them.

According to Gass and Mackey (2007), the communicative approach and, more specifically, the task-based approach “draw heavily on the interaction hypothesis as part of their theoretical basis” (p. 190), which argues for the fundamental role of language use – that is, of interaction – in the language learning process. However, Task-based language teaching (TBLT), which has a strong commitment to both theory and practice, can also be explained from a philosophical perspective. First of all, it is important to understand that it is based on the concept of “learning by doing”. According to Long (2015), one of the philosophical underpinnings of such approach is ‘l'education integrale’ – that is, complete education –, in which it is believed that “people learn best through personal experience, through practical hands-on work with real-world tasks” (p. 67). In this sense, abstract concepts can be understood because they become meaningful once they are contextualized in activities from the real world. Again,

as Long explains, “new knowledge is better integrated into long-term memory and more easily retrieved for use if tied to real-world events and activities” (p. 69). For the author, other philosophical underpinnings of TBLT include: individual freedom, rationality, emancipation, learner-centeredness, egalitarian teacher-student relationship, participatory democracy, and mutual aid cooperation. Long (2015) draws on the core principles of “learning by doing” adopted by educational theorists and philosophers like Dewey (1950) and Freire (1996). Thus, the author goes beyond the cognitive explanation by showing that these philosophical principles and “their implications for language learning for the most part sit well with those of TBLT’s psycholinguistic underpinnings” (p. 66). Similarly, Ellis (2003) explains that a critical perspective on task-based research and teaching “forces us to go beyond the psycholinguistic rationale [...] in order to examine the social, cultural, political, and historical factors that contextualize teaching and how it takes place” (p. 333). This approximation of areas allows for an understanding of the social role of language teaching (LT), emphasizing that “those who oppose LT (of any kind, not just TBLT) having an emancipatory function need to recognize that a hands-off attitude is itself as ‘political’ and just as interventionist, for it helps perpetuate the status quo” (Long, 2015, p. 73).

Task-Based Language Teaching and the role of the teacher

Ellis (2003) explains that tasks “hold a central place in current SLA research and also in language pedagogy” (p. 1). In this sense, it is of fundamental importance to understand what a task is. For the author, independently of whether language learning is seen from an information-processing or a constructivist perspective, a task is regarded “as a process that requires opportunities for learners to participate in communication where making meaning is primary” (p. 319). Tasks, therefore, come in handy since they serve as tools “for engaging learners in meaning-making and thereby for creating the conditions for language acquisition” (Ellis, 2003, p. 319). Besides having a primary focus on meaning, tasks allow for a focus on form to take place, since “without attention to form learners’ interlanguages may stabilize and fossilization set in” (Ellis, 2003, p. 319). In this sense, “focus on form, in the context of meaningful use of language, may be necessary to promote and guide selective attention to aspects of input which otherwise may go unnoticed, unprocessed and unlearned” (Robinson, 2003, p. 641). From a psycholinguistic perspective, then, tasks create the possibility for the integration of form and meaning, a combination that has found strong positive empirical support (Long, 1997; Ellis, 2003).

Skehan (2009) also provides a very useful and pragmatic definition of tasks that can account for an information processing approach to language teaching. For him, “a task is taken to be an activity in which meaning is primary, there is some sort of relationship to the real world, task completion has some priority, and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome” (p. 84). In this sense, in Skehan’s definition, while conducting a task the student has a

communicative objective that relates to real world activities. In order to achieve such objective, s/he has to focus on transmitting ideas in an adequate way (taking into consideration the context), and also make use of strategic competence. The main focus is on meaning (and not on linguistic structures). Ellis also provides a very similar definition of tasks:

Chart 1 – *Definition of task based on Ellis (2003)*

A task (based on Ellis, 2003):

- 1) focuses on pragmatic meaning;
- 2) involves processes of language use that are related to the real world;
- 3) involves one or more linguistic skills;
- 4) is a workplan that requires different cognitive processes (for instance: selecting, comparing, classifying);
- 5) has a communicative outcome.

However, Skehan's (2009) and Ellis' (2003) definitions do not make any explicit reference to the importance of critical consciousness that is indeed at the heart of TBLT. Thus, I would like to reclaim the importance of recognizing the critical component as a necessary element of a task by adding a new element to Ellis' definition: 6) allows for the development of critical consciousness through contextualized language use.

Even though task-based language teaching is student-centered, it is necessary to acknowledge the important role of the teacher as a mediator as well. According to Samuda (2009), "central to the role of the teacher in TBLT must be ways of working *with* tasks to guide learners towards types of language processing believed to support L2 development" (p. 380). One example of this mediation is the guidance regarding the relationship between form and meaning. This is even more crucial when one considers a critical approach to language teaching, in which the development of critical consciousness is paramount and will highly depend on the teacher's mediation skills so as to promote questioning and critical thinking. However, Samuda explains that "the role of the teacher as a mediating factor in task-based language teaching remains virtually unexamined" (p. 379).

Samuda (2015) also describes the pedagogical task design as "a work in progress" (p. 280). She proposes a multidimensional workplan for understanding a pedagogical task, which would include different work-plans:

Workplan 0 is the designer's original workplan, typically represented in the form of the instructional materials that a teacher receives (or creates). [...] Workplan 1 is the teacher's prospective workplan, typically reflected as part of a lesson plan. [...] Workplan 2 – what I have termed the dynamic workplan – reflects on-line changes that the teacher may take as the task unfolds [...]. [...] Workplan 3 – the retrospective workplan – relates to the teacher's post-lesson reflections on what actually happened, and may involve further changes to be taken forward for use on other occasions. (pp. 281-282)

From this perspective, any pedagogical task needs to go beyond the task-as-workplan as defined by Ellis (2003), since the actual task only comes to life

as it is reframed and reinterpreted – not only by students but also by teachers, especially through their lesson plans, online-planning, and reflections for future reformulations. This suggests the relevance of developing systematic reflective research on how the teacher reinterprets the multidimensional workplan in the process of implementing a task-cycle. As we shall see, the perspective of the teacher is considered important in this study in the hope that it may bring a contribution to the understanding of such a process in a specific teaching context. In this sense, given the importance of the teacher's mediation and constant reformulation of a workplan, this study focuses on the teacher's perception of the implementation of a task-cycle so as to shed some light on some of the following questions as well: “[t]o what extent [...] is it possible to identify discursual and interactional features of teacher performance that might be said to constitute elements of ‘task-based’ teaching? And in what ways may these distinguish the role of the teacher in TBLT from the role of the teacher in more transmission-oriented approaches?” (p. 380).

Investigating the role of the teacher in the implementation of critical tasks

This study aimed at developing a task-cycle for an English class at a technical school to develop learners' critical understanding of gender in the world of work. More specifically, then, the objective was to understand the teacher-researcher's¹ perception of classes that contain both communicative and critical objectives and make use of different media. In order to do so, the analysis focused both on tasks as workplans and on tasks as processes to investigate the different roles of the teacher in implementing tasks designed from a critical perspective. This piece of study – derived from a broader study – is, therefore, of a qualitative interpretive nature and follows the premises of action research. According to Davis (1995), interpretive qualitative studies “focus on the construction or coconstruction of meaning within a particular social setting” and may utilize “interviews, observations, and other forms of data collection within the time frame necessary for gaining an understanding of the actors' meanings for social actions (an emic perspective)” (p. 433). Action research, unlike more traditional methods of conducting research, gives more freedom for the researcher and recognizes that doing research, like anything else, is also political. Thus, action research seems to be in line with a critical approach to language teaching in the sense that it is “a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level” (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 226). Moreover, action research in education tries to bridge the gap between research and practice. Thus, such an approach seems to be appropriate for this context of investigation, in which the teacher-researcher's practice will be investigated through the lens of task-based language teaching and of critical approaches to language teaching by looking at the teacher-researcher's perspectives. However, the local focus of the study is not to be seen as too narrow – from

the perspective of action research, the local “investigation is part of a broader agenda of changing education, changing schooling and changing society” (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 233). Therefore, it is hoped that the understanding of the complexities of a specific educational context may shed some light on how to teach an additional language from a critical perspective by taking into account the specificities of each teaching situation.

The present study was conducted with a group of 20 high school students² at a technical public school in Santa Catarina. This is because the regular school is the main place where students should be prepared to use language to mediate their social practices. In this sense, it is usually the school that allows the development of the students’ literacy. Besides, it is my belief that the context of teaching English in regular public schools deserves more attention from Academia.

More specifically, then, the study was conducted at the Federal Institute where the teacher-researcher had been working for over two years. It is important to mention that, unlike regular public schools, Federal Institutes are part of the Federal Network of Scientific, Technical and Technological Education. Such Network had its beginning in 1909 with the creation of 19 schools in different parts of Brazil. From that time on, the Federal Network has expanded exponentially, especially in the last decade: there are now 38 Federal Institutes in every state of Brazil, each one comprising several campi. Even though at its conception the so-called Federal Schools understood technical education as the place for teaching the working class a specific profession, such a view has now expanded so as to challenge the very dichotomy between technical and scientific education. The expansion of the Federal Network is, in this sense, an endeavor envisaging the articulation among science, work and culture from the perspective of human emancipation (Pacheco, 2011, p. 5). In this sense, the school is not meant to “feed the market” by teaching the students the skills necessary for the insertion into the capitalist system (p. 7). Rather, the type of education advocated for in this context is one that is based on the promotion of inclusion in such an unequal society, and on a project to build a society that has political, economic and social equality as its foundation. In this sense, the work perspective adopted by the Federal Institutes is one that is directly connected to radical democracy and social justice (p. 8).

After conducting the process of needs-analysis, and bearing in mind that the students are inserted in a technological area (that is, Mechanics) and should also develop the critical skills in order to understand but also produce media texts, a task-cycle was developed with the aim of preparing them: 1) to reflect critically about the language used in media, especially when it comes to the representation of women in the world of work and 2) to develop their linguistic skills so as to produce language/take action avoiding gender-bias or stereotypes (see Chart 2).

Chart 2 – Task-cycle

1. Pre-task	Task 1 – The world of work Task 2 – The world of media
2. Mid-task	Task 3 – Gender in the media Task 4 – Understanding the effect of media in women's lives Task 5 – Fighting against media stereotypes Task 6 – The mechanical technician profession
3. Post-task	Task 7 – Creating an infographic

The teacher-researcher filmed the classes and kept self-report diaries of each class in order to analyze his own perception of the effects of developing and implementing the task-cycle in the specific teaching context. Even though several other instruments were used for data collection in the research process (questionnaires, interviews and the completed tasks, reflection sessions, just to name a few), due to space limitation this article focuses on the analysis of the data pertaining to the teacher-researcher's reflexive diaries only.

The self-report diaries were written at the end of each class. Besides taking notes of noteworthy events or critical moments that took place during each class, the teacher-researcher wrote about how he felt, and what worked or did not work from his perspective. Some entries to the diary also include notes about contextual aspects (that is, about what was taking place at the school or educational context) that he thought might influence the teaching and learning process, or even thoughts about the data collection itself. Based on the notes of the self-report diary, critical moments were selected from the recordings of the classes, and later transcribed for analysis. The answers to the questionnaires about the tasks and their implementation were also taken into consideration by the teacher-researcher during the implementation process, since they could guide pedagogical choices.

The self-report diaries were analyzed through a thematic analysis so as to understand the students' and the teacher-researcher's perceptions of the implementation of the task-cycle. According to Yukhymenko et al (2014), "thematic analysis is the search for and extraction of general patterns found in the data through multiple readings of the data" (p. 96). The themes that are identified in the data become the categories for data analysis. More specifically, the thematic analysis was conducted mainly deductively, since it focused on understanding whether the students' perceptions emphasize their learning both in linguistic and critical terms. When it comes to the teacher-researcher's perceptions, the focus was on what happens when a task-cycle (task-as-a-workplan) aiming at fostering the students' linguistic and critical skills is implemented (task-as-a-process). This is not to say, however, that an inductive approach to thematic analysis was disregarded: actually, themes and subsequent categories may emerge from the data itself. In other words, the theoretical framework of this study guided

the analytical process of identifying recurrent themes in the data; however, other themes that were not covered theoretically may also be significant for the understanding of the context of investigation.

A sample of the thematic analysis for each instrument was reviewed by a rater – who has a teaching degree in English language and literatures, experience in teaching English and is acquainted with the areas of TBLT and Critical Pedagogy – in order to ensure the data thematic analysis credibility. The rater read the samples and gave feedback on the themes that were identified, at times suggesting new ones or even refining the definition provided for each one of them. Finally, such themes were analyzed and discussed in light of the theory of both task-based language teaching and Critical Pedagogy.

Critical tasks in action: when the task-as-a-workplan becomes the task-as-a process

According to Long (2016), from a task-based perspective the whole approach needs to follow certain premises. This means that needs analysis, task design, methodological principles and pedagogic procedures need to be in line with the task-based approach. In this sense, it is not enough to design a task (task-as-a-workplan) and expect it to continue being a task during its implementation if one does not keep in mind a few principles. For the author, a task syllabus (or a task-cycle) should be implemented according to ten methodological principles (MPs):

- MP1: Use task, not text, as the unit of analysis
- MP2: Promote learning by doing
- MP3: Elaborate input
- MP4: Provide rich input
- MP5: Encourage inductive “chunk” learning
- MP6: Focus on form
- MP7: Provide negative feedback
- MP8: Respect learner syllabi and developmental processes
- MP9: Promote cooperative collaborative learning
- MP10: Individualize instruction (Long, 2016, p. 7).

Based on such principles, a teacher should select the appropriate pedagogic procedures (PPs) for task implementation: “selection of appropriate PPs from the many available in each case is best left to the teacher, who is usually the expert on local circumstances, assuming that he or she is well trained and experienced” (Long, 2016, pp. 7-8). In this sense, a teacher should also take into consideration “individual learner differences (age, level of first or second language [L1 or L2] literacy, working memory, aptitudes for implicit or explicit learning, etc.), type of linguistic feature (salient or nonsalient, marked or unmarked, fragile or robust, etc.), and so on” (p. 8). In the case of this study, it is important to highlight that one’s methodological principles and pedagogical procedures should also take

into consideration Critical Pedagogy, since the focus is not only on linguistic development, but rather on critical language development.

From the analysis of the self-report diaries, it was possible to identify different difficulties faced by the teacher and/or the students. Those were related to interpersonal issues, class management, linguistic level, time, material conditions and resistance to the topic. These themes, termed as “difficulties faced by teacher and/or the student”, refer to challenges that emerged from the teaching-learning context that could not be predicted by the task-as-a-workplan. Because such difficulties required different decisions to be made, the diary also presents actions undertaken by the teacher-researcher in order to overcome a difficulty, facilitate the teaching-learning process or the achievement of the goal of a task. These were termed as “strategies” in the thematic analysis.

In relation to the difficulties caused by interpersonal issues, the diary presents the case of one student who was excluded from a group activity and ended up completing it alone. The same issue appears later on in the diary when the teacher talks to the student about the situation, and she asks him not to insist that her peers should work with her if they do not want to do so. Such difficulty influenced decisions regarding group work: in order for students to feel more comfortable in the classroom, they could decide who they should work with. The teacher’s idea to assign groups every now and then had the purpose of having students interacting with different peers in the class. However, he thought that interpersonal relations should be a priority in this context in the sense that students should feel comfortable to work together. Thus, the teacher-researcher was concerned with the methodological principle of promoting cooperative or collaborative learning.

The diary presents many instances of difficulties involving class management. Most of them have to do with students who discuss with their peers topics other than the focus of the class or who make jokes excessively. The teacher-researcher notes that “students never seem to be focused/immersed in the topic of the class³” (translated from Portuguese). For the teacher, when they are talking about the topic, they usually transform it into a joke – in this sense, it seems that they avoid taking seriously the issues that are being discussed. According to the diary, most of the teacher’s interventions had to do with directing the students’ focus to the task or topic of the class. According to Urzêda-Freitas (2012), critical teaching should not be a site of jokes or laughter that undermine important topics – when we open the space for that, we run the risk of banalizing issues that should be approached with seriousness (p. 88). This is not to say, however, that humor cannot serve as an important component for promoting critical learning. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that the students who participated in this study are teenagers and that this careful look at critical aspects is something that they are starting to learn about or that they still need to develop.

Some problems involving class dispersion were considered by the teacher as a result of technical problems or material conditions – once the class is disrupted by a technological problem, for instance, the students tend to focus on something

other than the task at hand. The problem of class management also influenced another difficulty: time, that is, the duration of the class. Because of students' lack of focus in some tasks (and also technical difficulties), they would tend to take much longer than planned. Due to that, as we shall see, the teacher-researcher made different adjustments to the lesson plans, adopting different strategies to ensure the continuity of the tasks and of the classes.

There is just one instance in the diary that signals a difficulty caused by "linguistic level". Even so, it is important to acknowledge that the teacher-researcher mentions that for some students the tasks are much easier. Thus, they spend much less time working on them, while other students need more time (and possibly assistance from the teacher). When it comes to material conditions, the teacher-researcher reported having problems with the functioning of the sound system and/or projector, Internet connection, among others. This made him choose to move to a different room in one of the classes, for instance.

While reporting on a reflective session, the teacher-researcher mentions that one of the students said that the students complained about the classes because, according to them, the teacher would only "present one side of the story". This occurrence in the diary was termed "resistance to the topic", and this was a recurrent topic in critical moments and in the interviews conducted with the students.

Having understood some of the difficulties that emerged during the implementation of the critical task-cycle from the teacher-researcher's perspective, let us now focus on the theme "strategies", that is, on the actions undertaken by the teacher-researcher during the task-cycle. The following chart contains all samples of the diary that were termed as "strategies" and brings a classification to each one based on its aim.⁴

Chart 3 – Teacher's strategies from the self-report diaries

Strategy description	Aim
1 - [Nesta Task 1 os alunos puderam praticar/ revisar vocabulário relacionado a profissões (vários perguntaram "How do you say... in English?") e fui colocando no quadro. Ao compararmos as profissões ao que as pessoas fazem, os alunos puderam notar como associam profissões aos estereótipos. Ao discutir as suas respostas com os pares, alguns alunos quiseram primeiramente escrever suas respostas.]	Strategy used to facilitate the learning process (vocabulary learning)
2 - [então tive que ajudá-los de forma a repetir algumas das falas.]	Strategy used to facilitate the learning process (understanding of the audio/oral comprehension task)

3 - [Como não haveria tempo suficiente para a Task 3, mas havia sobrado tempo ao final da Task 2, decidi pedir para que eles escolhessem seu personagem favorito, e anotassem no caderno suas características e profissão. Estas informações serão utilizadas na atividade que será desenvolvida na próxima aula.]	Strategy used to facilitate task continuity / progression (in-between classes)
4 - [Fiz o questionamento e anotei a situação para refletir sobre suas implicações, consequências e sobre possíveis ações futuras.]	Strategy used to facilitate critical development
5 - [Tive inclusive que utilizar o plano B de levar a turma para a sala de informática para que fizessem a apresentação em um local com internet com fio (já que a sem fio não estava funcionando na sala de aula). Como nem todos apresentaram, tive que fazer um novo combinado de dar continuidade à atividade na próxima aula.]	Strategy used to overcome a technical difficulty
6 - [Eu tentei mediar o processo apenas “wrapping up” as conclusões trazidas pelos alunos.]	Strategy used to facilitate critical development
7 - [Tenho notado que não devo atuar como “fiscal”, mas que tenho que observar o momento adequado para fazer intervenções que não sejam recebidas com resistência.]	Strategy used to facilitate critical development
8 - [Estratégia: retomar a atividade lembrando as estratégias de leitura - lembrando que eles devem focar nas perguntas - que devem sublinhar ou destacar as palavras que os ajudaram a chegar às conclusões (palavras que conhecem, palavras similares ao português, etc). Também falar sobre a importância de compreender um texto em inglês.]	Planning of a strategy used to facilitate the achievement of the task goal
9 - [Outra reflexão importante: a falta de tempo para realização das atividades. Caso não haja tempo suficiente, pedir para que na próxima semana levem o que faltar do Task 6 como tarefa para casa (atividade avaliativa).]	Planning of a strategy to overcome a technical difficulty
10 - [Hoje usei a estratégia de explicar a importância de ler um texto em inglês usando as diferentes estratégias. Recapitulei com eles estratégias de leitura que podem ser usadas e auxiliei alunos individualmente.]	Strategy used to facilitate the achievement of the task goal

11 - [Na atividade em que deveriam comparar as imagens de engenheiros no google com as imagens de engenheiros com a hashtag “I look like an engineer”, entreguei a atividade anterior em que eles usaram o comparativo para que pudessem se basear nela. Coloquei exemplos no quadro e recapitulei com eles as regras para uso do comparativo.]	Strategy used to facilitate the learning process (focus on form)
12 - [Então acabei limitando um pouco o tempo de duração das atividades, uma vez que os alunos parecem levar muito mais tempo do que o necessário (não há foco).]	Strategy used to overcome a difficulty
13 - [Mudei um pouco a ordem das atividades (primeiro eles fizeram a parte 2 - de compreender um infográfico) para depois fazer a parte 1 (de coletar as informações). Os alunos tiveram que sair da sala para coletar as informações, e eu auxiliei os grupos de forma mais individual.]	Strategy used to facilitate the learning process
14 - [Durante a atividade, notei que o foco estava em apresentar os dados, e não em refletir sobre eles. Por conta disso, tentei trazer uma discussão sobre o tema, fazendo com que alguns alunos apontassem a falta de representatividade para meninas na área de mecânica, a semelhança com relação à profissão de engenharia (apresentada por um dos grupos), etc.]	Strategy used to facilitate critical development

As we can see, the teacher-researcher made use of different strategies during task implementation with different objectives. These were all actions that could not be foreseen by the task-as-a-workplan and required reflection during the task-as-a-process. For instance, it is possible to observe strategies used in order to facilitate the learning process, such as when he asks students to name the professions of the people in different images (in Task 1) and decides to write the names of professions on the board so that all students get to know the vocabulary (strategy 1). Another example of learning facilitating happens when there is a problem with the sound in an oral comprehension task (also in Task 1) and he decides to repeat the narration of the video so that the students can hear it better (strategy 2).

When there was a task in which the students had to compare the representation of engineers on Google to the representation of engineers on social media, the teacher-researcher opted for providing the students with the handout from the previous class in which the students had learned about the comparative form. Besides, he decided to include a few examples on the board and recapitulate the rules for the use of the comparative form (strategy 11). Even though this was not

part of the lesson plan, he decided it would be necessary to make students focus on form again so that they could perform the task successfully.

Besides directing students' attention to form, the teacher-researcher changed some of the tasks in terms of order of completion. In Task 7, for instance, he decided to have students complete first Part 2 and then Part 1 of the task (strategy 13). This is so because Part 1 involved data collection; that is, it required that students got together in groups and then collected information at school. Part 2, on the other hand, consisted in the analysis of different infographics so as to prepare the students for the final part of the task. In this sense, the strategy used was to first make the students focus on the more analytical (and perhaps individual) part of the task and then only later work collaboratively.

Some strategies adopted relate to class-continuity or task progression. This is so because, even though the task-cycle was planned keeping in mind the time frame for each class, contextual factors (such as in the case of the aforementioned difficulties) impacted the implementation process. In order to make sure that the tasks were all connected and maintained such connection and progression throughout the task-cycle, the teacher had sometimes to recapitulate what was previously seen (as in the aforementioned strategy in which the teacher directs students' attention to form). Another strategy was to prepare the students, at the end of a class, for a forthcoming task, such as when they had to make a list of the main characteristics of their main character, who would be described and presented in the subsequent classes (strategy 3).

A similar action was undertaken in strategy 10, when the teacher-researcher initiated the class asking the students about which strategies they could use for comprehending a text in English. This is so because he observed that, while completing Task 5, the students had presented difficulties or had even given up on completing parts of the task. Because they seem to have found the task too difficult, some students might have felt discouraged to complete it. After reflecting and planning on what to do in the following class (strategy 8), when they would have to continue completing Task 5, the teacher-researcher decided to focus on recapitulating reading strategies (strategy 10) in order to help students achieve the goal of the task. In this sense, the understanding of the students' needs and difficulties, along with after-class critical reflection were important for the development of such strategy.

As we have seen, one of the difficulties pointed out by the teacher in the diary has to do with the duration of the tasks and of the class itself. For various reasons – including lack of focus, technical problems, interpersonal issues –, the students tended to take much longer than expected to complete the tasks. One of the strategies adopted was to be stricter regarding the time devoted for the completion of each task (strategy 12). Another example of a strategy planned in case there was not enough in-class time – which did not end up being necessary and, thus, was not implemented – was to have students complete a part of task 6 as homework and bring it in the following class (strategy 9).

When there was a technical problem with the Internet that prevented students from presenting their favorite characters (using the slides they had saved in their online clouds), the teacher-researcher decided to move the class to the computer room. Because this affected the duration of the task itself, he had to inform that a few students would have to present in the following class (strategy 5).

The teacher-researcher also adopted a few strategies that were related to critical development during the task-cycle. When a student presented his favorite character using an image that made a reference to Hitler, he adopted the strategy of questioning the student why he had done so (strategy 4). He wrote in his self-report diary that he decided to reflect further on the topic so as to avoid confrontation, since the students had expressed discontent and resistance in the previous classes when the teacher disapproved some of their comments. This is because he realized that lecturing the student at that moment would not be effective in critical terms because that would probably create further resistance. Later on, during the task-cycle, during a critical discussion, he decided to act more as a mediator during the reflection, posing questions, wrapping up the students' answers, and allowing them to reflect for themselves (strategy 6). Strategy 7 is similar in the sense that the teacher-researcher decides not to act as someone who is there to correct the students' views, but more as a mediator of the reflection process. In this sense, he devised a strategy that was more aligned with a critical perspective to language learning, since one of its main objectives is to promote students' questioning of the status quo through dialogue and problematization (Freire, 2005). After all, the objective is not to convince students into believing that our views are politically correct, but rather to allow them to inquire – by themselves – on the reasons for social inequality (Urzêda-Freitas, 2012, pp. 90-91).

The last strategy, number 14, concerns directing students' attention towards critical reflection. When students were presenting their infographics on gender in the school context and in the world of work, they seemed to be only focused on reporting the information they had compiled. In this sense, they did not present their views on the implications of such reality. Because of that, the teacher-researcher adopted the strategy of asking them questions regarding the causes and consequences of the lack of female representativity in the profession of mechanics and in the engineering profession.

What both the difficulties and the strategies that were reported by the teacher-researcher seem to suggest is that, as Van den Branden (2009) states, "tasks on papers (...) are not blueprints for activity in authentic classrooms" (p. 271). Tasks provide, in this sense, a "pedagogical space" (Samuda, 2015) in which teachers and students move (and make decisions) so as to bring about language learning. As we have seen, the teacher-researcher had to engage in a process of online planning in order to take actions that would fit the contextual needs that emerged from task implementation. In this sense, it may be argued that the teacher has a fundamental role, since he/she may take the role of

motivator (i.e. launching the students into action by constructing joint projects), organizer (making sure that students know what they are expected to do and organizing temporal and spatial aspects of task performance), and, last but not least, conversational partner and supporter, as the more proficient, knowledgeable interlocutor who can feed the language-learning needs of different students in a wide variety of ways.

In the context of this study, and based on the strategies adopted by the teacher-researcher, it is possible to say that the critical task-based teacher also needs to work in accordance with the methodological principles of TBLT and with the premises of Critical Pedagogy in order to: guarantee that the task goals will be met, make sure that students will pay attention to a specific aspect (be it form, meaning or critical thinking), overcome technical and material difficulties, and facilitate students' learning process by taking into consideration their specificities.

One should not forget, though, that students may also devise strategies during the implementation process of a task-cycle. Thus, it is not only the teacher who reinterprets the task-as-a-workplan. The implementation is actually an interplay of actions taken by teacher and students. In the self-report diary, the strategies taken by students and noticed by the teacher-researcher included: using a previously learned language chunk ("How do you say... in English?") in order to overcome lexical difficulties, and writing down their responses to a question before sharing their views with the class. Even though this was not the focus of the present analysis, understanding students' strategies for language learning is also important for teachers who might then design tasks that are suitable for students' needs.

Final considerations

As Samuda (2015) explains, a task is always a workplan that will be reinterpreted once it is implemented. In this sense, this piece of research indicates the pivotal role of the teacher in the implementation process of a critical task-cycle. After all, there is no guarantee that a task will indeed be interpreted as a task or even be regarded from a critical perspective during its implementation. Hence the relevance of the teacher's mediation. In the case of this study, the teacher-researcher adopted different strategies during the task-cycle so as to 1) guarantee that the critical task goal would be met; 2) direct students' attention to a specific topic (for example, to the form which the task focused on or to the critical discussion proposed by it); 3) overcome technical and material conditions presented by the teaching context; and 4) facilitate students' learning. In this sense, many aspects that could not be foreseen during the design of the task-cycle emerged during task implementation, requiring the teacher to work "in tandem", that is, developing simultaneous strategies to cater for critical language development. This points out the complexity involved in the implementation of a critical task-cycle and suggests the necessity of developing teachers' critical reflection and knowledge regarding both TBLT and Critical Pedagogy.

The teacher-researcher's perceptions of the task-as-a-process also demonstrated that critical development – just like language development itself – is a continuous process that requires having students' contexts as the starting point of the teaching-learning process. In this sense, it is of great importance to resignify students' roles in the classroom so as to avoid falling back into transmission-based types of education (Freire, 2005). Actually, because students might not be accustomed to approaches that break away from more traditional views of education, some resistance might emerge from implementing a critical task-cycle. Such moments should not be regarded by the teacher as evidence of the ineffectiveness of his/her work, but rather as an important part of the process of critical language development. From the perspective of the teacher-researcher, tasks seemed to have worked best when students were heard, when questions were posed to them, when different views were juxtaposed and when they could get to know facts and data that allowed them to reconsider certain views or myths. In this sense, data analysis points out that the broader political, social and educational contexts (that is, the macro context) play a role in students' development (the micro context). Thus, any critical project would ideally involve not only teachers and students, but all those who are part of the teaching-learning process, including administrators, parents and policy makers.

Notes

1. The teacher-researcher referred to is the author of this article.
2. Since this study involves human beings, its project was submitted for appreciation by the Ethics Committee at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) through the online "Brasil" platform (www.plataformabrasil.saude.gov.br). Given that the study met all the ethical requirements, it was approved by the committee on April 26th, 2017 with the number 2.032.334. It was only after the project's approval that data collection took place.
3. "*Noto que eles nunca estão focados/imersos no tema.*"
4. The chart presents the data samples as they can be found in the original, that is, in Portuguese, which is the teacher-researcher's first language. However, in the body of the text they are explained and analyzed in English.

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