Using ePals.com in English classes: A tool for internationalization of public elementary education in Brazil

Usando o ePals.com nas aulas de Língua Inglesa: uma ferramenta para a internacionalização da educação básica pública no Brasil

Maria Elizabete Villela SANTIAGO (UFMG)[1]
Reinildes DIAS (UFMG)[2]

ABSTRACT

Globalization has blurred geographical borders, allowing a multidirectional flow of cultures, languages, knowledge and actions among peoples around the world. Simultaneously, the New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs) have enabled interactions not constrained by space and time, generating information and service offers and demands among individuals from anywhere in the world. In this scenario, both English Language (EL) and Digital Literacies have become paramount for international interactions. Despite the guidelines in UNESCO's documents and in the Brazilian Common Core Curriculum, EL teaching in public schools is still far from meeting the needs of a global society. In this paper, I analyze the intercultural, digital, multimodal and EL literacies of a group of public school 6th graders and establish the gaps between this diagnosis and the international and national educational guidelines. Then, I present the resources offered by ePals.com as a possibility to fill the identified gaps.
Keywords: Globalization, Internationalization of Elementary Education, ePals.com, EL teaching, Literacies

RESUMO

A globalização fluidificou borrado as fronteiras geográficas, permitindo um fluxo multidirecional de culturas, línguas, conhecimento e ações entre os povos ao redor do mundo. Simultaneamente, as Novas Tecnologias de Informação e Comunicação (NTIC) possibilitaram interações não limitadas pelo espaço e pelo tempo, gerando ofertas e demandas de informações e serviços entre indivíduos de qualquer parte do mundo. Neste cenário, tanto a Língua Inglesa (LI) quanto os Letramentos Digitais se tornaram primordiais para interações internacionais. Apesar das diretrizes nos documentos da UNESCO e no Base Nacional Comum Curricular, o ensino da LI nas escolas públicas ainda está longe de atender às necessidades de uma sociedade global. Neste artigo, analiso os letramentos intercultural, digital, multimodal e em LI de um grupo de alunos da 6ª série de escolas públicas e estabeleço as lacunas entre esse diagnóstico e as diretrizes educacionais internacionais e nacionais. Então, apresento os recursos oferecidos pelo ePals.com como uma possibilidade de preencher as lacunas identificadas.
Palavras-chave: Globalização, Internacionalização da Educação Básica, ePals.com, Ensino de LI, Letramentos

[1] Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brasil. Doutoranda no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos Linguísticos. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7404-2914; elizabetesantiago.unifei@gmail.com
[2] Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brasil. Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos Linguísticos. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6140-463X; reinildes@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of globalization, started in the 20th century, has blurred geographical borders, allowing a multidirectional flow of cultures, languages, knowledge and actions among peoples around the world. This flow generated a process of internationalization intensified by actions for technical and educational cooperation between countries. Simultaneously, the New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs) have enabled interactions not constrained by space or time, which, in turn, generate information and service offers and demands among individuals from anywhere in the world.

The interactions arising from an increasingly international and digital society use a variety of semiotic resources directly influenced by the social context (HODGE; KRESS, 1988; KRESS, 2003). The proper use of the semiotic resources available in each context demands a set of literacies that encompasses written and oral verbal language, static and moving visual language, and knowledge about digital technology. These literacies, according to Kress (2003), cannot be considered apart from social, technological and economic factors. They are also marked by power relations, mainly present in the educational and professional contexts that place the English Language (LE) as the dominant foreign language (CRYSTAL, 2012) and may work as a gate keeper for the individuals willing to participate in new social practices.

The relevance of the inclusion of aspects of multimodality and NICTs, present in social practices of this century, in teaching EL is advocated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as well as by the Brazilian Common Core Curriculum[3] (BCCC). Although the term internationalization is not explicitly mentioned in the BCCC, it, along with UNESCO's official documents, indicates concern with the development of intercultural competences for global citizenship. Among UNESCO's documents, the Guidelines on Intercultural Education (2006) highlights the importance of an intercultural approach in the development of global citizenships translated in 3 principles:

> **Principle I** Intercultural Education respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all. (…)
> **Principle II** Intercultural Education provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society. (…)
> **Principle III** Intercultural Education provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations (p. 33-37)

---

[3] Base Nacional Comum Curricular – BNCC.

Therefore, in order to educate global citizens, it is necessary for the schools to incorporate not only the teaching of one or more foreign languages, but also providing room for intercultural interactions benefiting from the possibilities offered by the NICTs. This approach to education has been studied and disseminated by researchers interested in providing a more broad, meaningful and active learning experience to students at all levels. The most prominent group dedicated to these studies, known as The New London Group has published their *manifesto* for a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies, in 1996, where they defend what they call new learning.

The motion for improvement in EL teaching approaches in regular schools in Brazil, with special focus to public ones, can be seen in the Ministry of Education documents such as the BCCC and the State's Common Core Curricula and in the guidelines of National School Book Program[4]. However, despite these efforts, educational research results still indicate teaching approaches based on the 'old basics' (KALANTZIS; COPE, 2012), i.e., focusing on decontextualized language and grammatical rules (BRITISH COUNCIL, 2015).

In order to investigate new possibilities to provide a language learning experience based on real communication events, as proposed by Dias (2015), in the present paper, I discuss how the resources available at ePals.com, an online learning community which unites teachers and students from all over the world, can help the internationalization process for a group of 6th graders from a public school. The results of this investigation can contribute to the enhancing of pedagogical practices based on intercultural interactions for the process of internationalization of elementary public education in Brazil.

In the next sections, I present an overview of the educational guidelines pro school internationalization, the concept of intercultural education, the theoretical support based on the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies and a description of ePals.com. Next, I analyze the diagnosis of a group of public school 6th graders intercultural competences and the possibilities offered by ePals.com resources to fill the found gaps.

2. Educational guidelines pro school internationalization interfaces with the pedagogy of multiliteracies

Although there is no explicit mention of the process of internationalization in in BCCC guidelines for EL teaching (BRASIL, 2018), it along with UNESCO's documents for cultural diversity show serious concern with intercultural competences to allow successful interactions between people from different countries and cultural backgrounds. This concern also includes the various modes in which communication can happen, i.e., the multimodal semiotic resources

---

[4] Programa Nacional do Livro Didático – PNLD.

employed in international interactions in the digital era. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 present, respectively, UNESCO's policies on cultural diversity and BCCC guidelines for EL in Brazil.

2.1 What UNESCO proposes for a cultural diverse society

Before discussing UNESCO's principles on cultural diversity, it is paramount to understand the concept of culture it adopts. Based on discussions at the World Conference on Cultural Policies (1982), the World Commission on Culture and Development (1995), and the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development (1998) UNESCO endorsed the definition of culture "as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, [encompassing], in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (2002, p. 4). Once the concept of culture is established, it is necessary to discuss the importance of cultural diversity in the 21st century society.

According to UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2002), cultural diversity should be considered the common heritage of humanity and, should, therefore, be respected as requirement for an ethical society where individual differences need be treated with dignity. The document also presents the globalization process, intensified by the NICTs, as both a challenge for cultural diversity, due to the massification of information and customs, and an opportunity for dialogue among different cultures. It also states that for this dialogue to occur, assuring social cohesion and peace in the society, it is essential to create policies that guarantee the inclusion and participation of all citizens. The principle of multicultural inclusion supported by UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2002) encompasses the two pillars of the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies, multiculturality and multimodality (KALANTZIS; COPE, 2012). In the document, there is the stated commitment from the member states to help encourage linguistic diversity at schools and full access to all forms of expression and technological knowledge.

Besides the assumption that linguistic competences, in both mother tongue and foreign languages, are paramount to promote access to and acceptance of different cultures (UNESCO, 2003, 2014, 2015), there is special emphasis on the use of the Internet tools as a manner to promote internationalization at home, especially when there are political and economic constraints on international student mobility. Hence, the development of Digital Literacies (DLs) are encouraged as empowering tools which break "through traditional constraints of space and time as well as the boundaries of current educational systems [and] offer more and more opportunities for learning outside of formal education systems" (UNESCO, 2002, p. 34).
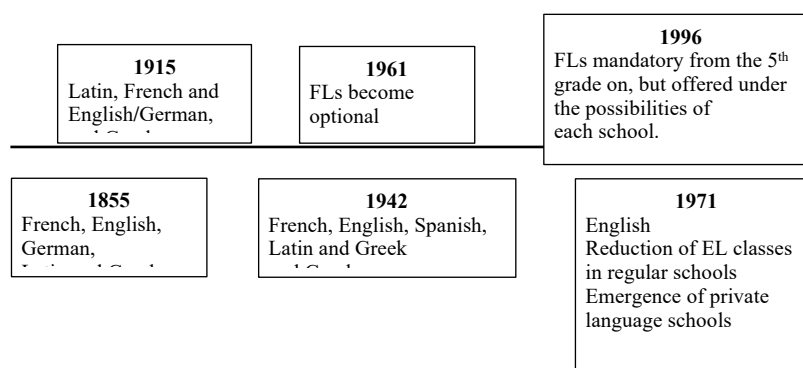
Besides encouraging international interactions among learners, UNESCO's principles also recommend teachers' participation in international cooperation programs either by traveling abroad or by profiting from the NCIT tools (2003).

2.2 The Brazilian Common Core Curriculum guidelines for EL teaching

The Brazilian Common Core Curriculum (BCCC) is a normative document which defines the set of essential knowledge and skills that students all over Brazil must develop throughout primary and secondary education (BRASIL, 2018). In its 3rd version, the BCCC brings, for the first time, EL as the official foreign language to be taught in Brazilian schools. The two previous versions allowed the choice between English and Spanish.

Before discussing the guidelines for EL teaching in the BCCC, it is imperative to present a brief history of foreign language teaching in Brazil. Fortes (2017) presents a retrospective of language education in Brazil which enables the understanding of the current state of affairs in ELT in public schools (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Time line of foreign language teaching in Brazil in the 20th century

| 1915 Latin, French and English/German, | 1961 FLs become optional | 1996 FLs mandatory from the 5th grade on, but offered under the possibilities of each school. |

| 1855 French, English, German, | 1942 French, English, Spanish, Latin and Greek | 1971 English Reduction of EL classes in regular schools Emergence of private language schools |

Source: adapted from Fortes (2017)

EL, then, departed from being one of the foreign languages taught in the country in the end of the 19th century to the only mandatory language taught by the end of the 20th century. The author acknowledges the rise of EL as the main FL in Brazil as a result of political, economic and social factors. Among these factors, she cites: a) the immigration of North Americans to the country after their Civil War, who in order to preserve their religious values, founded International Schools where EL was the official language, and b) the opening of the Brazilian market to foreign capital during Juscelino Kubitschek's presidency, followed by high foreign loans and the entering of multinational companies in the country. Eventually, the choice of EL as the prescribed language in the BCCC can be considered a strategic step towards the internationalization of education in Brazil. In this sense,

Crystal (2003, 2012) discusses the role of EL as a gate keeper to access to knowledge and social climbing.

The BCCC, ascribes to the literacies in EL the role of allowing "new forms of student engagement and participation in an increasingly globalized and pluralistic social world in which the boundaries between countries and personal, local, regional, national and transnational interests are increasingly blurred and contradictory" (BRASIL, 2018, p. 237). This view corroborates UNESCO's recommendations for valuing different social uses of EL and abandoning, therefore, the concept of correct or better English, generally ascribed to the variants coming from hegemonic countries such as the United States and England. In other words, English is seen as a *lingua franca* (ELF), enabling interactions between all types of speakers. Elder and Davies (2006, p. 328) list 4 types of situations when ELF is present:

> ELF 1. The use of English in an interaction where at least some of the participants are non-native speakers (NNS) of English
> ELF 2. The use of English in an interaction where all the participants are NNSs and do not share the same first language
> ELF 3. The use of English in an interaction where all the participants are NNSs and all share the same (or similar) first language
> ELF 4. A (new) code used for interaction among NNSs, not standard English but based on standard English (SE).

Siqueira (2011) and Finardi, Santos and Guimarães (2016) endorse the view of ELF as the language used as a means of interaction between two people whose native language (including EL) are different. In this paper, this is the view of ELF adopted.

Another crucial aspect approached in the BCCC is the broadening of the concept of literacies, which considers different semiotic resources in the social construction of meaning (KRESS, 2003, 2010), i.e., the multiliteracies (NEW LONDON GROUP, 1996; KALANTZIS; COPE, 2012). Since EL multiliteracies are deeply connected to its social use, the document also includes the importance of a genre-based language teaching, which is present, either implicitly or explicitly, in the 5 organizing axes of EL competences, described in Table 1

Table 1 - EL competence axes in BCCC

Orality axis	Reading axis	Writing axis	Linguistic knowledge axis	Intercultural dimension axis
Language practices in use Listening and speaking for the social construction of meaning in face to face or NITC-mediated interactions	Interactions between reader and text based on understanding of (multimodal) genres which circulate in different social contexts. Development of critical reading competences and of a creative and autonomous learning path.	Process and collaborative writing Writing as a social practice Learner as protagonist	Contextualized practices of use, analysis and reflection upon language	Understanding of the continuous interaction and (re) construction of cultures in the contemporary society. Understanding of different groups, interests, agendas, linguistic repertoires and cultures which constitute open and plural identities. EL as a *língua franca* performing different roles and having its value, reach and effects in different social contexts Necessary deepening of reflections on relations between language, identity and culture.

Source: Adapted from Brasil (2018)

Despite the advances in the introductory text to the EL component in the BCCC, criticisms have been presented to its current version. The British Council (2017) analyzed the BCCC and presents two major concerns in its report. The first concern comprises the high incidence of competences represented by verbs which demand low cognitive effort, according to Bloom's Taxonomy. According to the study, 80% of the cognitive processes present in the learning objectives belong to this group which comprises the actions of remembering, understanding and applying. Higher cognitive processes like analyzing, evaluating and creating account for only 20% of the desired learning outcomes. The second concern presented in the British Council report is related to the flexibility of the curriculum content considering regional characteristics. The second version of the BCCC left 40% of the competences to be decided by the school and/or teacher according to their students' needs and cultural characteristics. Therefore, only 32 learning objectives were assigned for each grade. In the third version there was a drastic increase in this number, which jumped to 88 learning objectives, which may hinder the flexibility of the curriculum to include regional

characteristics. In this scenario, it is paramount for teachers to critically analyze the BCCC and select which learning objectives should be prioritized in order to allow curriculum flexibility to comprise local needs. They also need to include activities and tools that allow a more coherent and socially meaningful learning experiences in their pedagogical practice. In this sense, ePals.com community, presented in the next section, exemplifies Internet resources which may assist teacher to work with intercultural and multimodal competences in their classes.

3. ePals.com as a tool for internationalization

E-pals.com is a global community designed for connection, communication, and collaboration among teachers around the world (EPALS, 2018). It offers teachers the possibility to create or adapt projects for their students to work collaboratively with peers from various countries. According to Dias (2015), although it is not a specific environment for EL study, e-pals.com allows real and meaningful use of the language in projects involving several areas of knowledge as well as the production of multimodal texts. Furthermore, the interactions with interlocutors from different cultures and social contexts is essential for developing respect for diversity and relationship skills in online environments (DIAS, 2015). Thus, e-pals.com can be recognized as an international classroom, which is an enriching experience when cultural diversity is recognized and respected (STALLIVIERI, 2017).

The projects available in ePals.com can include one or more of the following objectives: cultural exchange, language exchange and subject-based exchange. The editing tools allow teachers to determine the start and end dates of the project, the number and age of the students, the disciplines involved (arts, business, language arts, history, math, music, physical education and health, reading, writing, science, technology and theater), project description, resources made available (videos, examples, texts, evaluation and self- etc.) and multimodal instructions for the proposed activities in the discussion board (EPALS, 2018). Participating students can interact with each other and with teachers during project development through activity forums or private messages, which allow the sending of written text, images, sounds and videos, thus becoming tools that enable interactions using various semiotic modes.

The social practices that occur in ePals.com can be considered Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE), defined by O'Dowd and Lewis (2016) as a joint action of groups of students from different cultural and geographic contexts mediated by a teacher or specialist in the areas involved. The authors emphasize the valuable contribution of IOI to a paradigm shift in language learning from focus on verbal language to the development of linguistic, intercultural and interactional skills that enable meaningful social relationships.

Besides the interdisciplinary projects, ePals.com offers an online penpal environment where teachers can set groups or pairs of students to write to each other. Differently from the projects, which have all the activities previously defined, the topics discussed in penpals can be preestablished by the teachers or students can be allowed to decide what to approach in their e-letters.

Once most of the students who participate on the activities in ePals.com are underage, there are safety measures created to prevent problems like pedophilia, for example. In order to create an e-pals account, teachers need to fill out a form with the following information: full name, email (preferably institutional), country, languages they speak, educational sector in which they teach, name and type of school, subjects taught, number of students per class, type of exchange they are interested in and a brief self-presentation. The profile is, then, analyzed before being accepted. Students, on the other hand, cannot create their profile directly, once the teacher is responsible for creating a student account, along with login and password. Data such as avatar or photo, displayed name and password can be modified by the student after their access to e-pals.

Either the forum interaction in the interdisciplinary projects or the messages sent through the penpal tools are monitored by teachers who may or may not allow their publishing. Teachers need to accept a moderator commitment term agreeing not to allow information such as full name, phone and address, as well as pornographic or illegal hate content (bullying, racism or any kind of prejudice).

4. Data collection and analysis

This research was conducted through an exploratory approach in order to uncover the gaps between what is recommended by the international and national guidelines regarding the internationalization of education and the competences that are really developed by the students who attend public schools. In addition to the investigation of this easily-detectable discrepancy, a second objective of this study was to examine one of the NICTs resources, the *e-pals* community, as a tool for providing the filling of the detected gaps.

The participants were twenty-four 6th graders, thirteen females and eleven males, from a municipal school in a small town in Minas Gerais State with ages varying from 10 to 13. The NICT chosen for analysis is the International Educational Community E-pals[5].

In order to evaluate the possibilities offered by ePals.com for the internationalization of public basic education, it was necessary to, first, identify weak points in the students' competences

---

[5] www.ePals.com

that could be improved. It is important to state that learners were not expected to master these competences at that point of data collection. They were considered desired competences for the beginning of internationalization process in middle school, focusing mainly on acceptance of different cultures, understanding of the EL presence in a global society and the role of the NICTs in connecting people from all over the world.

A diagnosis of the gaps between the desired students' competences for the internationalization of primary education process and their actual ones in the beginning of middle school, was conducted by means of an online survey via Google Forms[6], divided in 4 sections as shown in Table 2:

Table 2 – Survey sections

Section	Information gathered/asked
Students' use of technology	Devices owned by them or their family Internet access and purpose of use Knowledge about social networks and their resources Knowledge about creating and editing images and videos Access to webpages in English
Students and EL	Background knowledge Opinion about the importance of learning EL Knowledge about English-speaking countries (intercultural literacies/competences)
Students' learning style	Team working Attitude towards feedback
Personal information	Demographic data

Source: author's data

The areas for improvement identified in the respondents' answers were divided in four categories: digital literacies, EL literacies, intercultural literacies and collaborative work competences. After the categorization of students' needs towards the internationalization of their education, the ePals.com resources were examined to evaluate the ways they could contribute to fill the existing gaps and provide opportunities for enhancement of learning in an international environment.

4.1 Analysis of students' response to diagnostic survey

---

[6] https://goo.gl/forms/kA9coc0lWFjXkBfY2

The first section of the survey contained questions regarding the students' relationship with technology which could grant them access to other cultures and languages. From the 24 respondents, 11 have paid cable TV at home, which may indicate wider contact with other cultures[7]. In relation to this, one caveat is the fact that most of the TV series and movies available in the paid TV channels portray the United States culture, limiting, thus, the concept of multiculturality.

Another facilitator of learners' contact with other cultures and languages is the Internet. Thus, investigating not only how many respondents have access to it, but also, their purpose in using it as well as their degree of digital literacy, is relevant. From the 23 respondents who use the Internet, 20 have home access while the others navigate on the web at their friends' or relatives'. None of the students access the internet from school, once it is forbidden to take their smartphones to class. However, they occasionally go to the computer laboratory, where there is access to the internet, to do activities related to their regular classes. According to the experience the researcher had using the computer lab as well as what was reported by the students and teachers, the computers are outdated and present several connection problems, such as software incompatibility. Therefore, the activities developed in the lab are mostly related to free educational games and software[8].

The analysis of the second aspect investigated, i.e., the reasons the students alleged for accessing the Internet (Figure 2), revealed a predominance of activities related to information reception such as doing school and personal research and watching Youtube videos, followed by playing online games, which, in turn, allows some extent of interaction and activeness. More agentive uses of the Internet like posting videos and feeding one's blog or webpage account are among the least chosen answers[9] Only 5 respondents declared to use the Internet to learn a language.

Figure 2 – Reasons for Internet use
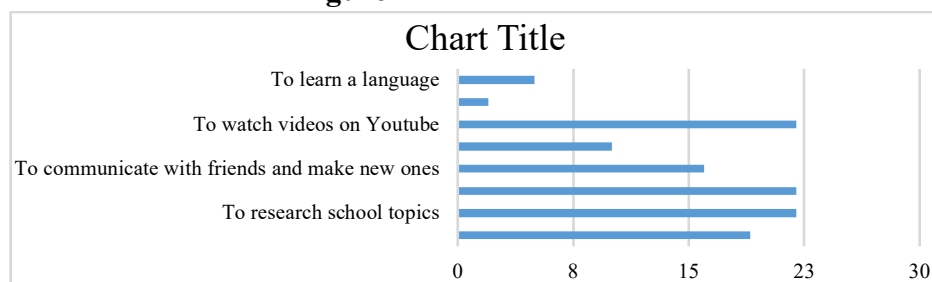
Source: author's data

Another element investigated in the survey was the level of (digital) literacy in relation to the production of static and moving multimodal texts. Hence, the students were asked to rank their ability in taking and editing pictures, downloading images and editing them, recording and editing

---

[7] Although the access to cable TV channels offer opportunities of contact with other cultures and languages, mainly English, most series and movies portray the United States,

[8] All the programs have to be compatible with Linux, the operational system used.

[9] Multiple choice question

videos and creating texts mixing static and/or moving images and words. As shown in Figure 3, respondents consider themselves completely apt to take pictures and reasonably dexterous in downloading images, editing pictures taken or downloaded and recording and editing videos. However, when asked about their ability in creating multimodal texts by mixing image and written text, they either admit having certain difficulty in it or having never done it before.

**Figure 3** – Students' level of digital literacy in the production of multimodal texts
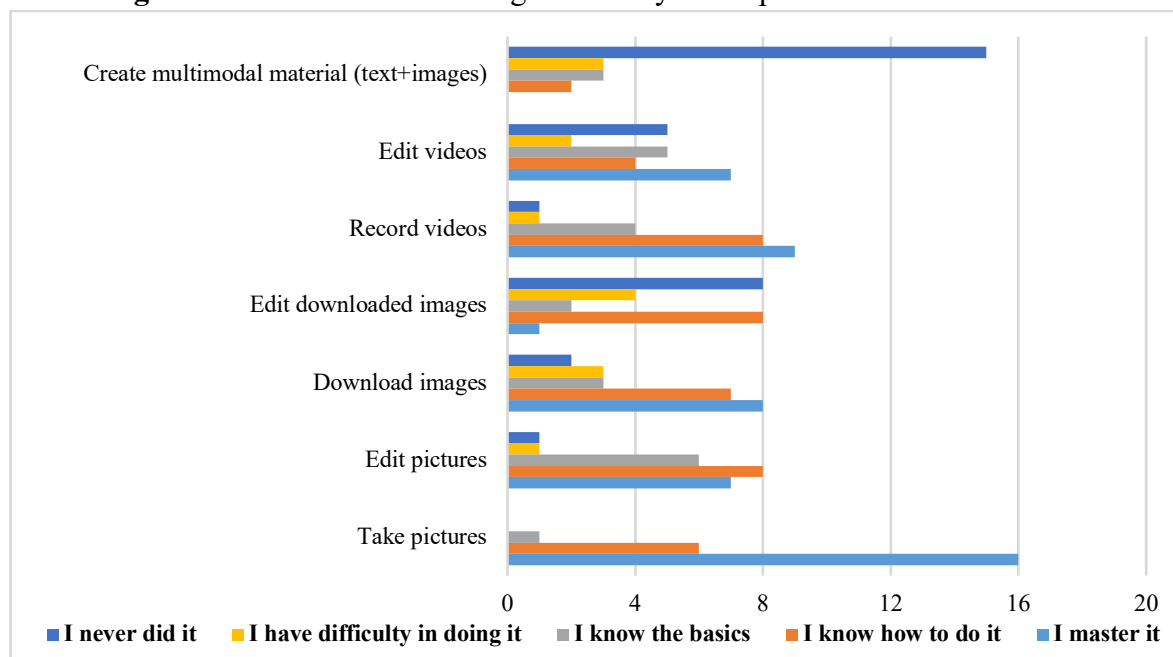
Source: author's data

The next question aimed at discovering if the Internet was a means of getting in touch with EL, considering it is still the most used language on the web. A research made in the end of 2017, indicated that more than one billion Internet users speak English (as a native or foreign language), followed by Chinese, spoken by a little more than 800 million users (INTERNET WORLD STATS, 2018)[10]. Despite the spread of the language in the Internet, less than 40% of the respondents access websites in English. This phenomenon could be associated with the level of literacy in EL declared by the students. In relation to background knowledge of EL, only 4 respondents declared having studied the language before[11] its formal teaching in the regular school, i.e., the 6th grade. Despite this, most of the respondents claimed having out-of-school contact with the language, being songs, videogames and movies the most cited (Figure 4).

---

[10] According to https://www.statista.com/statistics/262946/share-of-the-most-common-languages-on-the-internet/, in June 2017, English was the language used by a little higher than 25% of users, followed by Chinese, whose speakers were nearly 20% of users.

[11] It is important to emphasize that the survey was conducted in the very beginning of the 6th school year.

Figure 4 – Out-of-school contact with EL
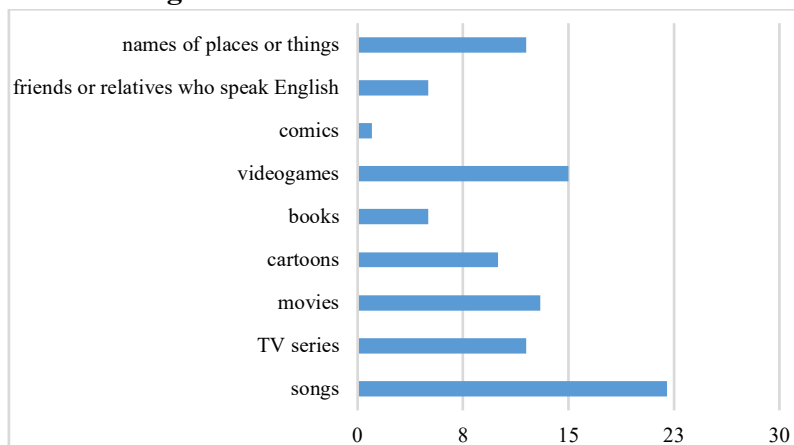
When asked about 4 of the competences included in the BCCC, speaking/listening, reading, writing and grammatical and vocabulary knowledge, all the respondents answered that their knowledge was limited to the smallest meaningful units, i.e., the words. The 5th competence proposed in the Brazilian Common Core Curriculum, intercultural dimension, was investigated through two questions: a) Name 3 countries where English is spoken and b) List up to 3 facts you know about each country. Regarding the first question, the most mentioned country was the United States (57%), followed by England (22%), Canada (11%) and India (8%) as shown in Figure 5. Only one respondent answered he did not know the name of any English-speaking country while other answers included Brazil, Russia and the cities Orlando and Amsterdam.

Figure 5 – Occurrence of English-speaking countries in students' answers
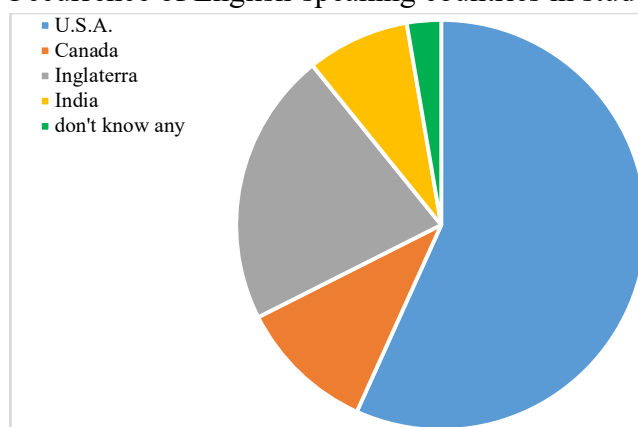
The answers concerning the second question, i.e., information the students know about the English-speaking countries they mentioned, are organized in Table 3 below:

Table 3 – Students' knowledge about English-speaking countries

Country	Respondents	Knowledge of the country and its people
The United States	3	*there the hours are delayed in relation to Brazil, and that there it snows and is quite cold, and that their money is the dollar.* *They speak English, I think they are organized, and I like different things.* *They speak English, I think there were two towers, most of people have a fair complexion … Disney, the radical roller coasters and the shops* *They speak English, most people have light eyes and fair skin.* *I only know there is no wastebin there in the toilets, and you wash your clothes at the time of the bath.* *They love and [indecipherable word], they speak English and Portuguese*
England / UK	1	*That there is a Queen there, and there are quite a few old cars, and that they do not evolve much*
India	2	*They speak two languages* *The people there worship several gods and sacred animals like the cow*
Canada	1	*There are cheap stores there*

Source: author's data

The survey section related to the students' learning style aimed at investigating aspects of collaborative work skills, learning autonomy and attitude to different opinions and criticism (feedback), which are paramount in an international learning environment.

The vast majority of respondents (87.5%) prefer working in teams because, according to them, they can learn from each other[12] and enjoy being with their friends[13]. The students who prefer working alone claimed they learn better this way or they do not get along with some classmates.

When asked about opinions that differ from their own during a team work, about 71% of the respondents claimed that they try to understand their colleagues, nearly 17% answered they prefer to stay quiet and not discuss the point while 12.5% try to convince the group to agree with them. None of the respondents chose the option "I argue because I know I am right and they are wrong".

In relation to the learners' autonomy, i.e., their active role learning process, the answers portray that most of the respondents seek for the teacher's (70.8%) or classmates' (45.8%) help, search in a book or in their class notes (37.5%) and use Google as a search tool (33.3%)[14] when

---

[12] The most frequent answer (14 hits).

[13] The second most frequent answer (5 hits).

[14] The students could mark more than one answer, what makes the sum of the percentages exceed 100%.

facing a problem they cannot solve. Only 8% of the students relinquish the solution for the posed problem. It is possible to note that the number of students who rely on the Internet as a learning tool is still low compared with more traditional options such as depending on their teacher's expertise.

In the next section, the results from the diagnostic survey are compared with UNESCO's and the BCCC in order to establish the gaps found. Then, ePals.com resources are presented as a manner to fill these gaps.

4.2 Matching gaps in students' literacies and possibilities in e-pals

Five dimensions were identified in the guidelines found in UNESCO's documents and the BCCC: Culture, Global citizenship, Multimodality, Digital Literacies and EL Literacies. In Table 4, a summary of these guidelines relating them to each dimension is presented. The results of the diagnostic survey done with a group of public school 6th graders are also placed under the 5 dimensions and the gaps found between what is prescribed and the learners' literacies are identified. The 5th column of Table 4 brings a list of ePals.com resources which could be used to fill the gaps found in students literacies aiming an international education.

Table 4 – EL teaching guidelines, diagnostic survey results and ePals.com resources

Dimension	Unesco	BCCC	Diagnosis	ePals.com
Culture	Cultural pluralism to promote cultural exchange and creative capacities	Cultural repertoire of English-speaking countries beyond the mainstream ones. Respect for different social practices Intercultural competences	Little knowledge about English speaking countries, limited to the US, England and Canada	Possibility for interaction with peers from 107 countries in interdisciplinary projects or through the penpal tool.
Global citizenship	Inclusion through access to information	Empathy and cooperation Responsibility and citizenship EL learning as a trigger for new ways of participating and engaging in a social, globalized and plural world. Critical and political agency	Preference for team work due to collaborative learning possibilities. Tendency to try to understand different opinions. Tendency to consider the teacher the primary source of knowledge	Room for negotiation between different cultures Based on learners' collaborative construction of knowledge Concern with social problems
Multimodality	Access to the means of expression and dissemination are the guarantees of cultural diversity	Multiliteracies – semiotic resources (verbal, visual, body language, audiovisual) combined to make meaning in a contextualized, dialogic and ideological continuous process.	Majority have little or no experience in creating multimodal texts.	Project artifacts involve the creation of multimodal texts such as posters, magazine articles, videos, etc.
Digital literacy	Internet as a tool for internationalization at home Digital literacy to enhance educational services and reach out the excluded Promotion of linguistic diversity in cyberspace and universal access to all information in the public domain	Digital culture	Majority limited to playing online games, watching videos on Youtube and doing school and personal research Little active participation such as posting videos and texts	Development of DLs necessary to production of the project artifacts Interactions in the discussion forums and penpal environment

The specialist

| FL (EL) literacy | Fostering the learning of several languages from the earliest age. Language as an essential component of *inter-cultural education* for understanding between different groups and respect for fundamental rights. | EL as a *lingua franca* Respect to diversity rather to worship of hegemonic variations such as American English and/or British English Focus on language as a social practice instead of as a set of rigid rules Listening and speaking skills turned to negotiation of meaning in either face-to-face or technology mediated interactions. Reading practices of a myriad of multimodal genres as a manner to develop critical sense and autonomous learning. Writing as a social practice considering its processual and collaborative nature Linguistic knowledge and intercultural competences for the understanding of different identities, agendas and the effect of language in the modern society. | Little contact with the language First contact in school Knowledge limited to small units of meaning | Authentic use of language in non-artificial, purposeful interactions Negotiation of meaning Understanding and production of genres Contact with language variation (native and non-native English speakers) |

Source: Adapted from UNESCO (2002, 2003, 2014, 2015), Brasil (2018), ePals (2018) and author's data

Final Remarks

The globalized and digital society demands literacies which differ from the ones traditional school has been teaching. Among these literacies are the intercultural competences linked to the knowledge of at least one foreign language, which, most of the times is EL, the multimodal literacies necessary for communication in dynamic and digital environments and global citizenship competences. The importance of these literacies is widely acknowledged in influential documents such as UNESCO's and the BCCC.

Despite the recognition of the need of a shift in old-school pedagogical practices, the reality in part of Brazilian public schools, mainly in relation to EL teaching is still attached to decontextualized grammar and vocabulary. This contradiction is even present in the BCCC, where directions for pedagogical practices designed for a global, multicultural and digital society are opposed to an overload of curricular content to be covered. The flaws in EL teaching in Brazil are intensified by financial limitations in the public education which may hinder the internationalization of this sector. There are, however, manners of providing meaningful and authentic learning experiences to students of a foreign language through the

use of the NICTs for multicultural interactions such as ePals.com. One of the most relevant aspects in this practice is the real use of ELF. In other words, by interacting with both native and non-native speakers of English, learners use ELF to engage in meaningful negotiations where there are real information gaps. Once language and culture are inseparable, another gain in students' learning is the contact with different cultures instead of a decontextualized use of EL. Finally, by producing and publishing multimodal material in ePals.com projects, learners develop their multiliteracies in terms of the use of diverse semiotic resources.

In this paper, we presented the global community ePals.com as a tool for international learning experiences through the collaborative work of teachers from several countries. ePals.com is an example of how the NICTs can provide opportunity for interaction with other cultures using ELF in public schools, where internationalization is limited by low budget.

References

BRASIL. 2000. *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais* – Linguagens, códigos e suas tecnologias do ensino médio. Disponível online em: http://portal.mec.gov.br/seb/ arquivos/pdf/linguagens02.pdf. Acesso em: 06 jun. 2008.

BRASIL. 2018. *Base Nacional Comum Curricular.* Brasília: Ministério da Educação. Available at: http://basenacionalcomum.mec.gov.br/. Access date: June 29, 2018.

BRITISH COUNCIL. 2015. *O Ensino de Inglês na Educação Pública Brasileira*: Elaborado com exclusividade para o British Council pelo Instituto de Pesquisas Plano CDE. São Paulo. Available at: < https://www.britishcouncil.org.br/sites/default/files/estudo_oensinodoinglesnaeducacaopublicabrasileira .pdf>. Access date: July 12, 2017.

BRITISH COUNCIL. 2017. *Seis aspectos para a revisão da 3ª versão da BNCC – componente língua inglesa.* São Paulo. Available at: https://www.britishcouncil.org.br/sites/default/files/leitura_critica_bncc-final-atualizacao-mar2018_2.pdf. Access date: March 15, 2018.

CELANI, M.A.A. *et al.* 1988. *The Brazilian ESP Project: an evaluation*. São Paulo: EDUC.

CRYSTAL, D. 2003. *English as a global language*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CRYSTAL, D. 2012**.** A global language**.** In P. SEARGEANT & J. SWANN (eds), *English in the world*: history, diversity, change. London: Routledge, 2012, 152-77.

DIAS, R. 2015. Multimodalidade e Multiletramento: novas identidades para os textos, novas formas de ensinar inglês. In: K. A. SILVA; J. ARAÚJO. *Letramentos, discursos midiáticos e identidades*: novas perspectivas. Campinas: Pontes, pp. 305-325.

ELDER, Catherine; DAVIES, Alan. 2006. Assessing English as a Lingua Franca. In: *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics,* **26**, 282-301. Available at: < https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303371859_Assessing_English_as_a_Lingua_Franca>. Access date: May 23, 2018.

EPALS. 2018. *Welcome to the Global Community.* Available at: < https://www.epals.com/#/connections>. Access date: Sep. 25, 2018

FINARDI, Kyria; SANTOS, Jane; GUIMARÃES, Felipe. 2016. A relação entre línguas estrangeiras e o processo de internacionalização: evidências da Coordenação de Letramento Internacional de uma Universidade Federal. *Interfaces Brasil/Canadá*. Canoas, **16**/1, pp. 233-255. Available at: < https://periodicos.ufpel.edu.br/ojs2/index.php/interfaces/article/view/7514>. Access date: April 2, 2018.

FORTES, L. 2017. The emergence of bilingual education discourse in Brazil: bilingualisms, language policies, and globalizing circumstances. In: *International Journal of Bilingual Education and*

Bilingualism, **20**/5, pp. 574-583. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2015.1103207. Access date: April 19, 2018.

FREIRE, M.M. 1998. *Computer-mediated communication in the business territory: a joint expedition through e-mail messages and reflection upon job activities*. Tese de Doutorado, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Universidade de Toronto.

HODGE, R.; KRESS, G. 1988. *Social Semiotics*. New York: Cornell University Press.

INTERNET WORLD STATS. 2018. *INTERNET WORLD USERS BY LANGUAGE*: Top 10 Languages. Available at: https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm. Access date: June 13 2018.

KALANTZIS, M.; COPE, B. 2012. *Literacies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

KRESS, G. 2003. *Literacy in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge.

KRESS, G. 2010. *Multimodality*: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication. London and New York: Routledge.

NEW LONDON GROUP. 1996. A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*; **66**/1. Available at: < http://newarcproject.pbworks.com/f/Pedagogy+of+Multiliteracies_New+London+Group.pdf>. Access date: Oct. 29, 2015.

O'DOWD, R.; LEWIS, Tim (eds.) 2016. *Online Intercultural Exchange*: Policy, Pedagogy, Practice. New York and London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis.

RAMOS, R.C.G. 2004. Gêneros textuais: proposta de aplicação em cursos de inglês para fins específicos. *the Especialist,* **25**.2: 107-129. São Paulo.

SIQUEIRA, D. S. P. Inglês como Língua Franca: O Desafio de Ensinar um Idioma Desterritorializado. In: T. GIMENEZ; L. C. S. CALVO; M. S. EL KADRI (orgs.). *Inglês como Língua Franca:* Ensino-Aprendizagem e Formação de Professores. Campinas: Pontes Editores, 2011, pp. 87-115.

STALLIVIERI, L. 2017. Estratégias para internacionalização do currículo: do discurso à prática. In: J. M. F. LUNA (org.). *Internacionalização do currículo*: educação- interculturalidade – cidadania global. Campinas: Pontes Editores, pp. 157-175.

SWALES, J.M. 1990. *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

UNESCO. 2002. *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*: a vision, a conceptual platform, a pool of ideas for implementation, a new paradigm. Cultural Diversity Series **1**. Available at: < http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127162e.pdf>. Access date: Feb 04, 2018.

UNESCO. 2003. *Education in a Multilingual World*. Paris: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Available at: www.unesco.org/education. Access date: Feb 04, 2018.

UNESCO. 2006. *Guidelines on Intercultural Education.* Paris: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Available at: < http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147878e.pdf> . Access date: Feb 04, 2018.

UNESCO. 2014. *Language Teaching in Education Systems*: Item 29 of the provisional agenda in the Hundred and ninety-fourth session. Paris: Executive Board. Available at: < http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002272/227206e.pdf>. Access date: Feb 04, 2018.

UNESCO. 2015. *Education 2030*: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Incheon. Available at: < http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002456/245656E.pdf>. Access date: Feb 04, 2018.

APPENDIX

Original text from Table 3 - Students' knowledge about English-speaking countries

The United States	*lá as horas são atrasadas em relação as do Brasil, e que lá neva faz bastante frio, e que o dinheiro de lá são dólares.* *falam ingles , eu acho que sao organisadas, e gostao de outras coisas diferente.* *eles falam ingles ,eu acho que la tinha duas torres gemias ,a maioria sao claras, a disney as montanha russas radicais e as lojas* *elas falam ingles , grande parte das pessoas la tem os olhos claros e pele clara* *eu sei que lá não tem lixeira no banheiro, e que se lava a roupa na hora do banho e só.* *ama e oria vala engles e portuques.*
England/The United Kingdom	*Que lá existe Rainha, e existem bastante carros antigos, e que eles não evolui muito*
India	*eles tem duas linguagem* *As pessoas la tem varios deuses e animais sagrados como a vaca*
Canada	*que la tem loja barata*

Maria Elizabete Villela Santiago *holds an M.A. in English from Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina and is a Ph.D. candidate at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, where she researches about internationalization of public elementary education in Brazil through the use of digital technologies in English classes. She is also a faculty member at Universidade Federal de Itajubá, where she teaches English for Specific Purposes and works in the International Affairs Office. Email:* *elizabetesantiago.unifei@gmail.com*

Reinildes Dias *holds a Ph.D. in Educational Technology from Canada's Concordia University. As a member of the post-graduate program at FALE, UFMG, she carries out studies related to language and digital technologies. She supervises academic work that is mainly oriented to teacher education in the context of Brazilian public / private schools. Her goal is to empower English teachers to respond to literacy pedagogy in their teaching. She is often invited to give workshops and plenary lectures in conferences all over the country. She was a consultant to the Department of Education of the State of Minas Gerais for a long time. Email:* *reinildes@gmail.com*