

Mediation in Teletandem: a locus to experience teacher learning and reflection.

A mediação no Teletandem: um locus de experiência de aprendizagem e reflexão para professores.

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of an investigation on how mediation sessions in the *Teletandem Brazil: Foreign languages for all* project can be characterized as a locus for foreign language teacher education. At UNESP-Araraquara, mediations have been carried out aiming at fostering participants' reflections by means of group sessions led by undergraduate and graduate students in languages and linguistics with knowledge and experience in Teletandem. Based on sociocultural theory (VYGOTSKY, 2007), the research focused on the role of mediators as the most competent peers in the scaffolding process and the strategies used to conduct the sessions. The data were collected by audio and video recordings of the mediation sessions and an interview with two mediators from different groups. Through qualitative methodology and an interpretive approach, the analyses show that, in a reasonably comparable way to the structure of a language class, mediators help learners in this telecollaborative context by sequencing themes and activities, using the scaffolding process and following the mediation guidelines for reflective practice. Resonating other research in Teletandem context, the results point to mediation sessions as a collaborative pedagogical practice context for teacher educators to develop teacher learning and reflection.

Keywords: Teletandem, Mediation, Language Teacher Education, Scaffolding process

RESUMO

Este trabalho apresenta os resultados de uma investigação sobre como as mediações no projeto "Teletandem Brasil: Línguas Estrangeiras para todos" podem ser caracterizadas como contexto de formação de professores de línguas estrangeiras. Na UNESP-Araraquara, a mediação tem sido realizada com o objetivo de fomentar a reflexão dos participantes por meio de sessões em grupo conduzidas por alunos de graduação em Letras e pós-graduação em Linguística, com conhecimento e experiência em Teletandem. Com base na teoria sociocultural (VYGOTSKY, 2007), a pesquisa enfocou o papel dos mediadores como pares mais competentes no processo de fornecimento de andaimes e as estratégias utilizadas para conduzir as sessões. Os dados foram coletados por meio de gravações em áudio e vídeo das sessões de mediação e entrevista com dois mediadores de grupos distintos. Por meio de metodologia qualitativa e abordagem interpretativista, as análises mostram que, de modo

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razoavelmente comparável à estrutura de uma aula de língua, os mediadores auxiliam os aprendizes nesse contexto telecolaborativo sequenciando temas e atividades, usando o processo de fornecimento de andaimes e seguindo as diretrizes da mediação com foco na prática reflexiva. Corroborando outras pesquisas no contexto de Teletandem, os resultados apontam para as sessões de mediação como um contexto de prática pedagógica colaborativa no qual formadores de professores podem desenvolver a aprendizagem e reflexão docentes.

Palavras-Chave: *Teletandem, Mediação, Formação de Professores de Línguas, Fornecimento de andaimes*

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, information and communication technologies have become fundamental not only in personal relationships but especially in professional and educational contexts. As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of such technologies has become even more visible as schools and teachers were forced to respond to the necessity of remote classes, sometimes even without appropriate time for planning and reflecting on how to adapt their teaching to online environments. Thus, in this scenario the need to educate teachers in a critical and reflective perspective about their own pedagogical (online) practices is crucial.

Aiming at collaborative language learning through digital technologies, the *Teletandem Brazil: Foreign languages for all* project (TELLES; VASSALLO, 2006; VASSALLO; TELLES, 2009) focuses on pairing native or proficient speakers of different languages in order to learn and practice each other's language in online synchronous meetings. Characterized as a telecollaborative context, the learning process in Teletandem is guided by the principles of equality, reciprocity and autonomy (SALOMÃO; SILVA; DANIEL, 2009) in such a way that participants alternate between the roles of student of their target language and tutor of the language in which they are proficient.

At the end of the interactions with their partners abroad, Brazilian students participate in a mediation session, conducted by a mediator, who guides the conversation and attempts to promote students' reflections regarding their practices. Evangelista and Salomão (2019) explain that mediation sessions are essential in telecollaborative practice, as there is a possibility that, alone, the participants may not be able to fully explore this context. In this sense, the mediator is a third person inserted in the collaborative learning partnerships established between the dyads (SALOMÃO, 2011).

In the *Teletandem Brazil* project at the UNESP Araraquara campus, the mediators are undergraduates in the Language and Literature Program or graduate students in Linguistics, who can be seen as pre-service teachers working together with the participants in mediation sessions and in other Teletandem activities (FERNANDES; TELLES, 2015). Conducting mediation sessions can promote an environment for these undergraduate and postgraduate students to build experiences with teaching

practice, allowing the “reflection of the future teacher about what they do in this new language learning context”, and also promoting “professional emancipation, in order to act either in face-to-face or distance language teaching contexts” (FERNANDES; TELLES, 2015, p. 283)³. Studies in Teletandem context (SALOMÃO, 2008; CANDIDO, 2010; ANDREU-FUNO, 2015; ESTELMANN, 2017; GARCIA; SOUZA, 2018) have pointed to mediation sessions as a possibility for foreign language teachers to reflect about theory and practice in their field of studies (SALOMÃO, 2008; CANDIDO, 2010; ELSTERMANN, 2017; GARCIA; SOUZA, 2018). Our study focused on how mediation sessions can be a locus for foreign language teacher education by analyzing the role of the mediators as the most competent peer in the scaffolding process and strategies during the sessions, in order to relate them to the guidelines for mediation⁴.

2. The Teletandem project

In-tandem learning consists of regular sessions in which native/proficient speakers of different languages meet with the purpose of learning each other's languages. Thus, during a session of approximately one hour, each participant alternates between the roles of tutor of their native language and student of the language they aim to learn (VASSALLO; TELLES, 2006).

Firstly, the *tandem* practiced in Europe was characterized by face-to-face sessions. Due to the geographical and economic difficulties of promoting such encounters, the *Teletandem Brazil: Foreign Languages for all* project emerged in 2006 as an alternative proposal. By using digital technologies and in order to ensure the traditional form of *tandem*, in which oral interactions were possible, Telles and Vassallo (2006) sought to promote the practice of speaking and listening skills through videoconference tools.

Considering the collaborative character of *in-tandem* learning process, Teletandem practice is guided by three basic principles: equality or separation of languages, reciprocity, and autonomy. For the first, Vassallo and Telles (2009) state that languages should not be mixed, which ensures the equity of both participants during the interaction and may challenge them to take risks in the language they are

³ Original: “reflexão do futuro professor a respeito do que faz nesse novo contexto de aprendizagem de línguas” (...) “emancipação profissional, de modo a atuarem seja em contextos de ensino de línguas presenciais, seja à distância”. (FERNANDES; TELLES, 2015, p.283).

⁴ The guidelines for mediation were taken from Salomão (2008)'s work. The researcher and other members of the Teletandem project proposed the guidelines regarding the mediators' performance in this context. The guidelines for mediation were first published in the *Teletandem Newsletter*.

learning, "even if, for them, speaking the language of proficiency is easier and faster to achieve their communication goals" (VASSALLO; TELLES, 2009, p. 23)⁵.

In terms of reciprocity, Vassallo and Telles (2009) assert that the participants "switch roles" during Teletandem interactions, being a student of the target language and an expert of their mother tongue or the proficient language. In this way, the time of the interaction sessions is divided equally, so that both languages can be practiced, avoiding the predominance of one language over the other. Reciprocity is also closely connected to the collaborative nature of such a learning context.

Regarding the autonomy principle, these authors emphasize the independence that participants have during interactions, since they take responsibility for their own learning process, also being able to support and encourage their partners. An interesting aspect is the question of what to do during the interactions, as participants can decide to have free conversations, to perform collaborative projects and to share exercises or other activities (VASSALLO; TELLES, 2009).

Telles and Maroti (2009) explain, based on socio-interactionist concepts proposed by Vygotsky, that collaborative learning highlights the possibility of interaction between people who have different levels of knowledge and skills, since the most competent speaker can find ways to help the other to learn, by offering scaffolding through interaction (TELLES, MAROTI, 2009). Hence, it is important to discuss some relevant aspects of sociocultural theory that support *in-tandem* learning.

3. Sociocultural theory: zone of proximal development and the *scaffolding* metaphor

According to Figueiredo (2019), the sociocultural theory as proposed by Vygotsky seeks to explain how human cognitive development is influenced by social interactions and participation in cultural activities. Aiming at human social activity, Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of mediation for human beings to establish their relationship with the world (VYGOTSKY, 2007). The mediation process can occur through the use of language, characterized as an instrument for social communication. Figueiredo (2019) explains that

Under the sociocultural theory, human beings constitute themselves and are historically situated through language. Therefore, they are constituted as interactive individuals; they appropriate knowledge and produce it, using speech to communicate with other people and to organize their thoughts (...) (FIGUEIREDO, 2019, p. 21)⁶

⁵ Original: "mesmo se, para eles, falar a língua de proficiência seja mais fácil e rápido para atingir seus objetivos de comunicação" (VASSALLO; TELLES, 2009, p. 23).

⁶ Original: "Segundo a teoria sociocultural, os seres humanos se constituem e estão situados historicamente por meio da linguagem. Constituem-se, pois, como sujeitos interativos, se apropriam de conhecimentos e os produzem, utilizando a fala para se relacionarem com outras pessoas e para organizar seu pensamento (...)" (FIGUEIREDO, 2019, p.21).

Concerning language acquisition, Figueiredo (2019) also affirms that, in terms of Vygotsky's ideals, biological factors are not enough for acquiring a language during childhood. The social environment holds an important contribution for language learning and several other activities to occur in the interaction between an adult and a child.

For psychological development, a distinction between the levels of real development and potential development of a child is proposed by Vygotsky. The real level consists in what the individual is able to accomplish alone and the potential level is characterized by activities that are performed through the assistance of another person (FIGUEIREDO, 2019). The difference between the two levels is known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined, in Vygotsky's words, as

the distance between the real development level, which is usually determined through independent problem solving, and the potential development level, determined through problem solving under the guidance of an adult or in collaboration with more capable partners (VYGOTSKY, 2007, p. 97)⁷

Following those statements and considering the socio-interactionist principles, Telles and Maroti (2009) affirm that the learning process in Teletandem is situated in the ZPD. Through the mediation session, participants are stimulated to reflect on their own practice in such a way that the “dialogic interaction enables an expert (such as a teacher) to create a context in which novices can participate actively in their own learning and in which the expert can fine-tune the support that novices are given” (ELLIS, 2008, p. 526).

In this way, the most competent peer assists the learner in task-solving by offering *scaffoldings*, understood as “the process of supportive dialogue which directs the attention of the learner to key features of the environment, and which prompts them through successive steps of a problem” (MITCHELL; MYLES, 2004, p.195). Therefore, according to Figueiredo (2019), it is possible to state that the term is used as a metaphor for offering temporary support for learners in solving challenges encountered in a given task that they would not be able to do independently.

Regarding the *scaffolding* process, there are six inherent functions performed by the most competent partner: a) engaging the learner in the task; b) simplifying the task; c) maintaining learners' motivation for accomplishing the task; d) identifying critical features of the task; e) reducing learners' frustration (stress); f) demonstrating or modelling solutions to a task (WOOD; BRUNER; ROSS, 1976; FIGUEIREDO, 2019).

⁷ Original: “a distância entre o nível de desenvolvimento real, que se costuma determinar através da solução independente de problemas, e o nível de desenvolvimento potencial, determinado através da solução de problemas sob a orientação de um adulto ou em colaboração com companheiros mais capazes” (VYGOTSKY, 2007, p. 97).

Finally, in view of such functions, it is possible to state that mediation and the figure of the mediator in collaborative learning become fundamental. Thus, it is essential to identify how mediators assist the participants in Teletandem context.

4. Mediation sessions in Teletandem context

The term mediation can be defined, according to Figueiredo (2019, p. 37) as an intermediary element in the relationship between people in regards to an object or with oneself, and may have, as a mediating element, a tool, a sign, or even other human beings. In collaborative *in-tandem* learning, Vassallo and Telles (2006) explain that mediation aims at the participants' development of linguistic and cultural competence. Therefore, after the online conversations, Brazilian participants attend mediation sessions.⁸

Telles (2015) explains that mediation sessions focus on “aspects of the target languages, the students' learning processes and the cultural aspects and themes that emerge (implicitly or explicitly) during the interactions” (TELLES, 2015, p. 607). Although the autonomy principle guarantees that participants take responsibility for their own learning, enabling them to set goals and decide, along with their partners, on strategies to achieve their purposes, participants may not be able to explore by themselves all the potential that the collaborative learning context offers (EVANGELISTA; SALOMÃO, 2019). In this sense, it is understood that the mediator will be a discussion partner and their action in this process may vary, as the help given by them may occur through instructions, questioning, monitoring (FIGUEIREDO, 2019), i.e., through their experiences, the mediator becomes able to instigate the participants' reflection on their own practices.

Salomão (2008) emphasizes the role of the mediator as a facilitator of reflection and presents a set of guidelines developed with other researchers in the first years of the Teletandem project to assist the reflection process during mediation sessions. Such guidelines are presented in the table below.

Table 1. The fifteen guidelines for mediation in Teletandem

<p>It is desirable and relevant if the mediator:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Establishes a good relationship with the participants in order to create a safe environment and permanent trust between them. 2- Promotes an informal and relaxed environment that encourages the participants to verbalize their anxieties, their needs and difficulties without embarrassment or fear. 3- Tries to reduce the asymmetry between him/her and the participants, because both should be "accomplices" in this process of teaching and learning virtually, working collaboratively in order to achieve a common goal. 4 - Tries not to prescribe a way that he believes to be correct, thus avoiding carrying out a directive pedagogical
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⁸ In the partner foreign university contexts, Teletandem is usually part of a course (of Portuguese), so mediation usually happens during class and is guided by the teacher.

practice that prevents reflection and learner autonomy.

5- Constantly negotiates with the participants regarding: the schedules of mediations; production and delivery of research data; type of resources used during mediation (camera, audio etc.), among others.

6 - Starts from the needs of the participants, experienced in their practice.

7- Does not condemn the pedagogical practice of the participant to not lower their self-esteem and not make them feel incapable or inferior to others.

8- Suggests, at least at first, alternatives so that the student could reflect and decide which would be the most feasible and appropriate way to proceed.

9- Evaluates the alternatives presented by the participants against other alternatives.

10- Makes use of collaborative supervision, giving freedom for participants to reflect on their practice, understand their actions and develop greater critical capacity.

11- Encourages participants by pointing out the positive aspects and, subsequently, make reflections about conflicting issues.

12- Collaborates to better focus on the problem and help the participant generalize an issue, especially if this is not an isolated case, but a problem that persists throughout their practice.

13- Tries not to work with preconceived answers, but to instigate participants to seek the best way to learn to reflect and find solutions for problems autonomously, making them able to resolve conflicting situations with which they will inevitably encounter in their future teaching/learning experiences.

14- Does not evaluate the student's practice as "bad", "better", or "worse", because no practice should be judged, since there are no better or worse practices than others, but different practices that are suitable or not for certain contexts.

15- Suggests, if necessary, theoretical readings focused on the needs of the participants.

Source: Translated and adapted from Teletandem News, Ano 1, n. 1, p. 7 *apud* SALOMÃO, 2008, p. 93.

The guidelines are based on the six inherent functions performed by the most competent partner, (WOOD; BRUNNER; ROSS, 1976), especially in relation to engaging the learners, maintaining their motivation, and reducing their frustration or stress by creating a safe and informal environment in which their practice could be shared without judgment. In order to provide scaffolding, mediators can simplify the task aiming to better focus on difficulties, suggesting and identifying critical features in learners' experiences. As for demonstrating or modelling solutions, the proposal is that mediation should be done collaboratively with participants, in non-prescriptive ways, to enable them to reflect and find the best ways to learn.

Evangelista and Salomão (2019) highlight three different types of mediation: individual; group; and by reflective diaries. They explain that individual mediation involves one mediator for each participant, and the sessions are scheduled in person or online. Group sessions occur in the language lab, after the end of each interaction, where participants meet around a table with one or more mediators, or through videoconferences via different digital platforms. In addition to the reflections made with the mediator's support, the group conversation provides an environment in which participants can share their experiences with their colleagues, being able to learn together and help each other. For the reflective journals, participants are asked to report their experiences in written form through the Moodle learning platform, guided by prompts or reflective questions (EVANGELISTA; SALOMÃO, 2019). In the case of Teletandem at the UNESP Araraquara campus, undergraduate and postgraduate students who

research this context, or volunteers with experience in the project, read and offer feedback to the participants after each diary entry.

Considering the performance of in-service teachers in the conduction of Teletandem mediation sessions, Souza, Zakir and Garcia (2021) analyzed the characteristics of preparatory courses for Teletandem mediations, held from 2014 to 2017 at the UNESP Assis campus, aiming to investigate the Teletandem Brasil project as a context for teacher education practices, in which the mediation sessions play an important role. Their reflection focuses the education of teachers and other professionals in a telecollaborative context, showing that the diversity of tools used for the mediation and management of the partnerships has allowed the adjustment of Teletandem for different mediation contexts.

Elstermann (2017) analyzed peer group mediation sessions to identify the learners' perspective of their language learning, the mediators' perspective in the sessions' conduction, and a deeper understanding of the peer group mediation sessions' characteristics. Results show that, since learners bring many different ideas regarding their Teletandem practices to the sessions, mediators should be open to the learners' impressions, using "their impulses to deepen reflection" (p. 340). In order to guide the sessions, mediators prepare general topics or reserve slots for opening discussion. In this sense, Elstermann (2017) affirms that the peer group mediation sessions seem to be appropriate for telecollaborative practices in which individual learners can meet with peers to jointly share and reflect on their experiences.

Regarding the different types of mediation sessions, Garcia and Souza (2018) focus their analysis on mediation sessions in a private Facebook group. They identified encouragement messages, Teletandem theory review, and organizational issues related to Teletandem interactions throughout the mediators' posts aiming to support learners' development.

Facing the relevance of mediation sessions and the considerations of this context as a locus for teacher education, this paper resonates with the previous works, aiming to identify the relationships between the conduction of mediation sessions and the organizational structure of a language lesson. Based on Richards and Lockhart (1994), a lesson is organized into sequences in order to achieve its momentum, through the dimensions of opening, sequencing, pacing and closure. Moreover, teachers can influence the kind of interaction that takes place in the classrooms regarding their action zone, by making eye contact, addressing questions to specific students and nominating them to actively participate in the lesson.

In the following section we describe the methodology used in order to discuss how mediation sessions could be compared to the way teaching events are structured and how this organization can

influence the dynamics of the sessions. We also address the mediators' performance as the most competent peer in the scaffolding process in accordance to the guidelines of mediation.

5. Methodology and data analysis procedures

By using a qualitative methodology with an interpretive approach, this paper focused on the analysis of two groups and their respective mediators, taking into account the opinions, experiences, and subjective feelings of the research participants (DÖRNYEI, 2007). The study was conducted in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, within the context of English-Portuguese language Teletandem interactions with Harvard University (Boston, USA) and Spanish-Portuguese language Teletandem interactions with University Javeriana (Cali, Colombia). Mediation sessions occurred at the UNESP-Araraquara language lab with the Brazilian participants after each interaction and were recorded with a camera and two portable audio recorders, with the permission of all participants.

The mediator responsible for the English-Portuguese groups was a PhD student in the Linguistics and Portuguese Language Program at UNESP Araraquara, in which she develops her research on Teletandem. She was not teaching at that moment, but had already had experience as an English teacher for an elementary school in a public institution. The Spanish-Portuguese group's mediator was an undergraduate student of the Language and Literature Program at UNESP Araraquara that, besides participating as a volunteer in the Teletandem project, was a member of PIBID (Institutional Program of Teaching Initiation), a program of the Ministry of Education aimed at valuing the teaching profession, by encouraging undergraduate students to have practical experiences by collaborating with public school teachers and university professors.

As instruments of data collection, audio and video recordings of the mediation sessions and a final interview were used. At first, a tape analysis was performed, by taking notes while listening to the audio and video recordings, also marking parts of the data (DÖRNYEI, 2007), which were then transcribed by the researchers. To protect the identities of the research participants, they are identified in this paper as "Mediator-S" and "Mediator-E", where the letter "S" refers to the Spanish-Portuguese group and the letter "E" to the English-Portuguese one, while the Teletandem participants are identified by numbers in each excerpt.

In order to understand the role of mediators in participants' assistance, an interview was conducted in 2020, individually and in written form through *WhatsApp*, with both mediators, aiming to elicit their considerations about their performance in the mediation sessions. Researchers performed a content analysis in the transcribed data and in the answers from the interview, looking for patterns (DÖRNYEI, 2007), in order to triangulate and interpret the data.

The content analysis focused on identifying the organizational structure of the Teletandem sessions that could be compared to the structure of a language class (RICHARDS; LOCKHART, 1994). It also addressed the strategies used by the mediators, performing the roles of the most competent peer in the scaffolding process (WOOD; BRUNER; ROSS, 1976; FIGUEIREDO, 2019), and attempted to correspond them to the mediation guidelines (SALOMÃO, 2008), as we describe in the next section.

6. Mediation as a locus to experience planning and organization of learning and reflection

Andreu-Funo (2015) explains that mediation sessions are contexts in which the planning of teaching and pedagogical practice is displaced, since teachers do not prepare themselves for a conventional class in the same way as they do for a mediation session. There is no strict pedagogical plan, but a language learning policy under construction that guides the pedagogical action of the mediator (ANDREU-FUNO, 2015). Hence, it is important to emphasize that even though the mediation sessions present a didactic purpose, the mediator does not play the role of a traditional teacher in this context.

The mediators in this study are characterized as students in initial and in-service teacher education. In the Teletandem context, they perform the role of a more experienced partner, who will assist participants in reflecting on their learning process during the discussions in the group mediation. However, by the way that mediators conduct the sessions, some elements can be approximated to the structural characteristics of a language lesson. Generally, a language lesson has a recognizable structure, taking place in a specific space involving teacher and student, and with particular types of activities (RICHARDS; LOCKHART, 1994). Group mediation sessions in the Teletandem project at UNESP-Araraquara usually take place in a defined physical space, where participants and mediators meet (called “language lab”), around a meeting table after the interactions.⁹

As Richards and Lockhart (1994) emphasize, when starting a class, teachers use some procedures that focus students' attention on the goals of the lesson, such as changing students' physical location, the teacher's location or posture, and also the volume or quality of the teacher's voice (WONG-FILLMORE, 1985 *apud* RICHARDS; LOCKHART, 1994). By observing the first contact mediators had with participants in the mediation session, Sartori (2021), in a linguistic analysis of the mediation sessions, points that the opening moments of a mediation session are established by making informal greetings; asking a general question or specific information that students can share; making eye contact

⁹ It is important to note that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the mediation sessions were moved to *WhatsApp*, and then to *Zoom* (CAMPOS; KAMI; SALOMÃO, 2021)

as a non-verbal marker; lengthening some words in speech as a way to create a relaxed atmosphere; and waiting for a volunteer or asking a student to start the discussions.

Excerpts 1 and 2 show how the mediators in our study begin the first mediation session by greeting students, seeking to know which of them are participating in the project for the first time and proposing a general question aimed at understanding how participants' first impressions and experiences with their foreign partners were.

Excerpt 1.

Mediator-E: Hello, girls! How's it going? Who here is doing Teletandem for the first time? (some participants raise their hands). Oh, that's nice! So, who wants to start commenting a little about the experience, what do you think was the coolest thing...

Participant 1: I really liked it because he knew how to speak Spanish so, it was easy to understand Portuguese. His accent, even though it tended to be more Spanish, it was still possible to understand very well the words he wanted to say. (...) But I liked it a lot!

Mediator-E: Did you like it, (name of participant)? (call another participant by name to talk about her experience)

Participant 2: I think it was very interesting! My partner didn't know how to speak Spanish at all, but he had already come to Brazil, he had already studied Portuguese for a while, so, his Portuguese was very good. He just needed some help... But I think it was very interesting thus, this exchange issue, cultural and personal...

Source: Transcription of the mediation conducted by Mediator-E on 10/09/2019.

Excerpt 2.

Mediator-S: Good evening, people! (the participants answer 'good evening') What a nice group this one of Spanish speakers. Everything was fine, wasn't it?, despite the rush today, the rain... So, today it is the first interaction of this group. So, what were your impressions? Who is interacting for the first time? (some participants raise their hands) Look at that, a lot of people... So, you can share, what were your impressions, any difficulties, something positive, like... what did you take from this first interaction, how was it, what was the most relevant aspect?

Participant 5: May I start?

Mediator-S: Yes!

Source: Transcription of the mediation conducted by Mediator-S on 03/13/2019.

The excerpts show that in this first meeting Mediator-E asked if a participant wanted to start the discussions and later selected a student to share their experiences while Mediator-S just waited a few minutes for a volunteer. The procedures used by mediators to focus participants' attention on the mediation concern calling participants by name and learning which of them are participating in the project for the first time. Both mediators try to create a casual environment, not only for those who are having a new experience, but also for those who already know the project, so that a participant would volunteer to share experiences, which corresponds to the *1st and 2nd mediation guidelines* (SALOMÃO, 2008).

Participants are asked to informally speak of their first impressions and how the first experience with their partners went. In order to guide them in reflections and discussions, some aspects upon which participants could reflect and present for the group are named, such as possible difficulties, positive experiences, and relevant aspects of the first Teletandem interaction. Since participants are situated in an environment of safety and confidence, the most competent partner provides scaffolding by reducing learners' stress, allowing that difficulties and needs could be verbalized without fears in order to assist participants' learning process.

In another session, as exemplified in excerpt 3, Mediator-E explains to students how and why she is changing the dynamics of this mediation session. According to Richards and Lockhart (1994), the way a lesson is started can reflect on the decisions made by the teacher, consciously or unconsciously, to establish the appropriate framework for learning.

Excerpt 3.

Mediator-E: Hello, folks, good evening! Today I'm going to change a little bit the dynamics and I'm going to give the word first to (name of the participant 10) because, what is happening, over the last sessions we have been talking a lot and (name of the participant 10) it is always coinciding with him being the last and so... Let's give him more space, is it ok if he starts today? Can it be? (looking at the mentioned participant) Then, you can tell us how it was, the subjects... How was the experience today, (name of the participant 10)?

(...)

Mediator-E: (when the participant 10 finishes his speech) What about you, girls? How was it? Today I saw that (name of the participant 4) laughed a lot and (name of the participant 3) had an experience a little different in the beginning but then everything came back to normal, right? To the normal state (laughing)

Source: Transcription of the mediation conducted by Mediator-E on 11/06/2019.

As shown in the excerpt, Mediator-E starts the session with participant 10 to give him a chance to speak more, as he was usually the last one to share his impressions and he did not have much opportunity and time to express himself. In this way, Mediator-E attempted to promote equal speaking opportunities for all participants and, consequently, stimulate the interest of the learner in sharing about his collaborative practice in Teletandem. In fact, not just in the first mediation session, but also in the subsequent ones, Mediator-E tries to promote a good relationship with the students (*1st mediation guideline*), by negotiating the discussion dynamics (*5th mediation guideline*), which allows the creation of a democratic environment.

In accordance with Richards and Lockhart (1994), interactivity with students depends on the teacher's performance zone. They state that "although teachers generally try to treat students fairly and give every student in the class an equal opportunity to participate in the lesson, it is often hard to avoid

interacting with some students more than others” (RICHARDS; LOCKHART, 1994, p. 139). The analysis shows that the mediators intended to be seated among the participants, creating an environment of equality for conducting the mediation session. In fact, it is possible to comprehend that scaffolding is also offered through the seating arrangement of the mediator and the participants in the language lab. Since they are seated around a table facing each other and the mediator, the positioning has the potential to make them accomplices in achieving a common goal, which corresponds to the 3rd *mediation guideline* (SALOMÃO, 2008). During the interview, mediators were asked about (a) how they prefer to conduct the sessions; (b) if there are any dynamics to be followed, and (c) how they distribute turn-takings for each participant, as described in the excerpts below.

Excerpt 4. Response of the Mediator-E, interviewed on 04/14/2020.

Mediator-E: In a certain way, I believe that I do prepare. For example, I mediated a group that had, if I'm not mistaken, only five students, so I knew all their names, and I could hear a lot of what they talked about in the interactions, so, in mediation, I could bring up what I heard by asking them about what I had heard, by saying that something I heard made me curious. Having a small group, it made me feel closer to them, and I had the freedom to comment on everything I had overheard in the session. Having participated as a student made me put myself in the participants' shoes; I could already imagine the situations they had gone through, what they had felt, etc. I usually always give the word to the participants according to the clockwise direction of the table, I think that the speech turns are more organized, although I emphasize that when a participant wants to comment on something in their colleague's speech, he can and should comment on it. I usually plan the time by my watch, trying to divide the time in equal proportions; when a student, in their turn, speaks less than the others, I ask another question; when there is some mediation time left, I ask a more general question in order to make the students talk to each other, share their experiences and tips, if they have any.

Source: Response of the Mediator-E, interviewed on 04/14/2020.

Excerpt 5.

Mediator-S: It is crucial to take notes in all these sessions to be able to articulate in a participative and collaborative way the progress of the statements, in this way, one participant complements the other and adds relevant information within the topic discussed. I always tried to do that (...) but it was difficult for me to materialize this all the time, sometimes I could take notes and, at the same time I took notes, I tried to explore some guidelines that I had previously established, you know? Then in the next session I would open my notes and bring up new topics. It is important the aspect of freedom in a mediation session, so that the participants truly feel that they are at a round table with a casual chat, it is great to maintain this friendly atmosphere, however, for this climate to persist until the end of the mediation and to be maintained in the others, it is necessary to know and be close to the participants. For this, I always used identification badges for all students that I conducted or made a kind of an attendance list to have all the names under control, so I could capture everyone's contribution; it is easier for you to manage the group making those who speak less feel more encouraged to cooperate in the session and for those who speak more you can control the excess of contributions, so the balance of the session is more democratic and participative. Having a script with: opening, themes/topics, reminders, and closing helps a lot in the enrichment of the mediation.

Source: Response of the Mediator-S, interviewed on 04/14/2020.

Mediator-E states that she could overhear the interactions of the groups she was conducting, which collaborated to bring up such aspects in the sessions. Also, by mediating smaller groups, she comments that she could be closer to participants and, consequently, because they were in a more informal and casual atmosphere (*2nd mediation guideline*), she had some intimacy to comment about what she had heard. Furthermore, she reports that because she was a Teletandem participant herself, this helped her to understand some of the issues experienced by the participants. Therefore, bringing her own experience to the group sessions constituted a scaffolding strategy that also helped to decrease the asymmetry between mediators and participants (*3rd mediation guideline*).

As for Mediator-S, it is noticeable that he uses a different strategy to conduct the sessions, in which he takes notes about the topics approached by the participants, and in the following mediation sessions he recaptures such points. Even with some difficulty in materializing all the discussions, he commented that he articulated the notes with questions that he had previously prepared. Starting from the students' needs (*6th mediation guideline*), the mediator focuses the attention of participants on critical features in their practice and offered scaffolding by fostering discussions and encouraging them to reflect and autonomously find the best ways to learn, teach, and solve possible challenges in their Teletandem partnerships (*13th mediation guideline*).

As explained by Sartori (2021) through conversational analysis of the mediation sessions, at first, mediators wait for a volunteer to share their experiences and if no one offers to start the session, strategies such as looking directly at a participant or inviting a student to start by pointing at the person or calling them by name are used. In this sense, from the excerpts 4 and 5, it can be perceived that the mediators created a specific order of turn-takings or, as they observed the session progress, they invited the participants by name to share their experiences, allowing everyone to participate.

As Mediator-E states, she organized the contributions of each participant, trying to distribute the speaking time equally. Despite such dynamics, she says that she used to explain to them that sharing their experiences was welcome, and when some of them did not contribute as expected, she asked other questions. Mediator-S' highlights also appear to value the importance of freedom in the group sessions, and define a script for the progress of the sessions, with opening moments, discussion topics, reminders and closures.

As Andreu-Funo (2015) explains, by observing the students during their practice, the mediator raises questions that may be relevant to problematize participants' learning. Because this is not a traditional language class, there is no specific content to be taught, and topics will emerge according to the experiences that participants had during the Teletandem interactions.

Another strategy mentioned by Mediator-S in the interview was the use of identification badges as a tool to create affinities and promote interaction between the participants. Also, this strategy could help the mediator monitor everyone's contribution democratically. The excerpt below demonstrates the use of such a strategy during the mediation session.

Excerpt 6.

Mediator-S: Your identification is here. You can sit here if you want to (...). Are you going to be in the mediation? What is your name? (participant 12 answers) And you are...? (participant 11 answers). All right, guys, so, let's start the mediation. Good evening for all... So, we have thirty minutes to talk, so I thought in dividing the time in such a way that: in the first moment we talk about the impressions and cultural aspects shared today; in a second moment we can talk about impressions, difficulties and linguistic achievements, material elaboration, and for the final moments, curiosities, some reminders and the difficulties of the day, ok? So, let's go. As today is your second interaction, let's talk a little about the cultural aspects. What was more relevant, what cultural information did you exchange that is relevant to share here with everybody. Let's start with (name of the participant 6).

Participant 6: Me! So, today I prepared a guide, like last week that you had suggested to me and today we talked about festivities, both in Brazil and in Colombia (...)

Source: Transcription of the mediation conducted by Mediator-S on 03/20/2019.

To conduct the sessions, Mediator-S used to take the participants' attendance by distributing identification cards that were placed in front of the participant on the mediation table. This identification strategy, besides helping the mediator with the management of a democratic participation, also allowed participants to interact with each other, as they could address their peers by name.

In a traditional structure of a lesson, the teacher analyzes the purposes and contents to be taught, and then the activities are planned to achieve these objectives, which enable the establishment of a script or a format for the class (RICHARDS; LOCKHART, 1994). Excerpt 6 shows that Mediator-S divided the session in three moments: a) discussion about impressions and cultural aspects; b) reports of linguistic advances, difficulties and materials participants might have prepared for the interactions; c) addressing of reminders to wrap up the session. In order to sequence the activities for the mediation sessions (RICHARDS; LOCKHART, 1994), he organized participants' reflections in Teletandem using a specific writing task for eliciting the points that should be addressed, such as themes, questions or interesting aspects that participants would like to discuss and perhaps had not been approached, as shown in the next excerpt.

Excerpt 7.

Mediator-S: Guys, I'm going to use these last few minutes that we have here to give you some cards that I cut, to make our mediation more democratic as possible. So, I'm going to give to you, I brought pens too, and it is not necessary to identify yourselves, it is just to write, it could be questions or could be

themes that you want to see debated here in the group, that sometimes we don't have time to do and sometimes it is an important aspect so it will be used for us to take as a guide for the other mediations and it is also an opportunity for us to know, suddenly a curiosity that you want to debate and so on, ok? So, if you want, later, to take more than one paper, I cut them out per paper so that we can separate them by questions or curiosities. But I will leave the notepad here in the middle of the table (...) If you want to write down several things on the same piece of paper, feel free to do it (...) Then next week we will start with the readings of those cards...

Source: Transcription of the mediation conducted by Mediator-S on 03/27/2019.

Based on the participants' needs (*6th mediation guideline*), the mediator is attempting to promote a student-centered approach by asking them to actively engage in the decisions of the topics to be discussed and letting them free to decide if they want to identify themselves on the cards and the amount of information they want to write. Mediator-S explains the activity and affirms that this is a way to democratize the sessions, i.e., to reduce the asymmetry between him and the students (*3rd mediation guideline*), which aims to promote a good relationship with the participants and a friendly atmosphere for sharing their experiences.

Regarding the activities' pacing, Mediator-S organized the mediation by planning to use the last minutes for the above-mentioned writing task, whose results would be used to guide the discussion in the next session. As Richards and Lockhart (1994) explain, "how much time to allocate to each part of the lesson is thus an important decision which teachers must make while planning or teaching a lesson" (RICHARDS; LOCKHART, 1994, p. 122). Excerpt 8 shows that while the students perform what was asked, the mediator explains that the next session will begin by reading cards so that discussions can be guided by such questions.

Excerpt 8.

Mediator-S: (...) So, now let's draw some cards so that we can take use your opinion, okay? If the person who formulated the question wants to start, in short, to identify himself, feel free. (the mediator starts to read the cards) "Difficulties in remembering the words in Spanish". Does anyone want to comment on that? Is there anyone else going through this?

Source: Transcription of the mediation conducted by Mediator-S on 04/03/2019.

With this activity developed in mediation, participants may acquire autonomy to bring issues from their interactions and reflect on them. It also shows that the mediator does not impose a prescriptive practice (*4th mediation guideline*) seeking to evaluate the alternatives brought by students, in comparison to others already approached by him (*9th mediation guideline*). By having students write discussion topics on cards, the mediator gives them time to think and aims to reduce stress for those participants who are too shy to speak out. Observing the use of such a strategy throughout the sessions,

the interview with Mediator-S aimed to collect more information about this strategy. Excerpt 9 brings in statements from the mediator about the proposed activity.

Excerpt 9.

Mediator-S: As democratic tools, I always left blank cards for the participants to put their questions, facts or curiosities that had not been explored in the session yet, this could occur anonymously or identified and in the following mediation I would draw these questions, many of them were clarified even before this verification occurred by the students themselves, proving that these strategies refined the group and always improved in each mediation. Acting this way, the mediation dynamics flowed in a very organic way, because everyone already understood that their contributions would be assimilated in the group, and this reflected in the self-management of the group itself, I just kept introducing some topics, but we always exceeded the mediation time. (...) This strategy worked out very well and from it I wish I had applied others. These are strategies that I name as "table strategies" to be done at the moment of mediation (...) these are ideas that articulate the interactivity between them at the table, and the territory of ideas may be extensive as the group also becomes more harmonic. As more dynamic the chat is with applications of ideas that make them interact, the more positive is the final result of mediation. (...) In my mediation sessions I was always very aware of each person's participation and consideration, and even with the badges some of them still didn't want to participate, that's where the idea of the blank cards came from. By using these strategies I was able to articulate the groups that I mediated considerably well.

Source: Response of the Mediator-S, interviewed on 04/14/2020.

It can be seen that the "table strategies" or "democratic elements" were consciously planned by Mediator-S to promote the participants' inclusion, and foster interaction and more autonomy in their learning. In this sense, mediation is a collaborative activity, and the mediator can play his role as a facilitator in this process. In the interview, Mediator-S affirms that the application of the cards' activity was effective and that greater interactivity in the sessions results in a more positive mediation.

As for Mediator-E, she assisted the participants in planning themes for the following interactions, through examples and suggestions, considering the needs reported by students, thus corresponding with the 6th mediation guideline (SALOMÃO, 2008).

Excerpt 10.

Mediator-E: But, as she said "ah, I wasn't sure when I spoke, I didn't know a word...", it's good for you to exchange e-mails, some contact information, and even at the end of the interaction think about what you can talk about in the next session, so that you can prepare yourselves. For example, politics, I don't know specific terms in English nor does she in Portuguese, so you can prepare yourselves and also increase your vocabulary to make the conversation more complex and to make it evolve in this sense and that you increase your vocabulary. I think it is super cool. (...) Because topics like that came up, politics, religion, topics that are more, like, in an area that we don't get too much in the common language, in day-by-day life, so it is nice to plan for it. "Ah, but it is so complex", ah, I don't know, let's talk about TV series, let's talk about books, or movie, about music...

Participant 15: I was trying to explain "umbanda" in English, it was very difficult...

Mediator-E: Really? Did those topics like this come up?

Participant 8: My colleague is researching about *Umbanda* and *Candomblé*, Brazilian religions, he is very curious to learn about it and then he asked me. So, until this part, ok, I was able to explain all the experiences and knowledge I had, but when I got to the politics part I really stopped and thought "I have never spoken about politics in English", so I don't have this vocabulary, it was very difficult...

Source: Transcription of the mediation conducted by Mediator-E on 10/09/2019.

Regarding the difficulty of participants in finding lexical resources for specific topics in the interaction, Mediator-E suggests that they try to communicate with their partners through other means, such as e-mail, and choose topics for discussion in the following interactions so they can prepare for it. In this way, the scaffolding is offered by presenting possible solutions to execute the activity and their benefits for the learners to decide on the most practical one for their partnership (*8th mediation guideline*). The participants engage in the topic by pointing out their difficulties when discussing specific themes related to Brazilian religions and politics. In this perspective, collaborative supervision enables an understanding of learners' own practice, promoting critical awareness (*10th mediation guideline*).

Garcia (2015) explains that the mediator "guides the learners when they have difficulties, fosters ideas and reflections, suggests topics to be approached in the partnerships, and even searches and instigates self-evaluation by the learners" (GARCIA, 2015, p. 731)¹⁰. To overcome the challenges, Mediator-E tries to monitor the development of participants over the weeks in order to identify important points to be observed in Teletandem practice. In excerpt 11, by remembering that the participant was apprehensive at the beginning of the interactions, the mediator leads the participant to a self-evaluation, considering that some encounters had already happened.

Excerpt 11.

Mediator-E: (directing to participant 13) **I remember that when you started you were a little bit afraid. How is it today? It is the fourth week already, we are already in the second half. How is it going?**

Participant 13: Ah, it is better, like, I'm still very stuck in English, sometimes I can't say some words and I can't see a way to make her understand. Like, I prefer to look up what the word is and say that word... than try explain it and speak. So I think this is a difficulty that I need to practice more. But it is flowing much better than before (...)

Mediator-E: (...) **And do you use images? Images are good. Sometimes you don't know how to explain some term like "feijoada", I don't know, the foot of the pork, the ear of the pork... I don't know...**

Participant 13: No, images no... What we did was that we exchanged several news when we were talking about environmental disasters... But image no...

Mediator-E: **Ah, no... But that's good that it is flowing better and next year, when we have more interactions and you could, you can come too, because it improves a lot.**

Source: Transcription of the mediation conducted by Mediator-E on 10/30/2019.

¹⁰ Original: "orienta os aprendizes diante de dificuldades, fomenta ideias e reflexões, sugere assuntos a serem abordados nas parcerias, e até mesmo, busca e instiga uma autoavaliação por parte dos aprendizes" (GARCIA, 2015, p. 731).

The participant comments on her experience, emphasizing that she has noticed an improvement, even though she still had difficulties with some words. She affirms that it is something that she needs to improve and comments that she prefers to search for the meaning of the words instead of explaining what she is trying to say to her partner. From the excerpt above, it is possible to observe that the mediator does not disapprove of the practice performed by the participant, avoiding damaging her self-esteem (*7th mediation guideline*), but rather she suggests another alternative to overcome the difficulty (*8th mediation guideline*).

Mediator-E offers scaffolding through the explanation and introduction of possible solutions by suggesting the use of images as an effective tool to explain some terms, such as those related to “feijoada”. The learner states that, when discussing environmental disasters, instead of images, they used news about the topic. As a result, the alternative presented by the participant is evaluated in comparison to the others (*9th mediation guideline*), not being judged as “better” or “worse” (*14th mediation guideline*). The mediator also encourages the learner to continue participating in the Teletandem project, demonstrating that language development is a continuous process of practice and reflection.

Since mediators try to offer help in a dialogic interaction based on participants’ needs experienced during Teletandem practice (*6th mediation guideline*), it is interesting to note the way Mediator-S deals with conflicts and challenges reported by participants, encouraging them to reflect on the positive aspects of the situation and their practice (*11th mediation guideline*).

Excerpt 12.

Mediator-S: And today, as we have had many comments here on this issue of repeating the introduction process, it is possible to realize that this is an opportunity for you to be more uninhibited, because you already know how it is, it is much more practical (...) Teletandem is nice because it makes us articulate this introduction process and lose this inhibition, right? I think it is nice when it happens like this, when the partner is going to change (...) So these mismatches, or unexpected events, they actually make us articulate the language (...) So, when this happens again with you, like “ah, a new person”, then you remember “ah, I have already done this, I already know how it works here”(...)

Source: Transcription of the mediation conducted by Mediator-S on 03/20/2019.

By emphasizing the recurrence of comments that involved switching partners in Spanish language interactions, requiring the pairs to introduce themselves again, Mediator-S aims to engage in and maintain the motivation of the participants in their interactions. Since it was something recurrent between the participants, the mediator collaborates to focus on the problem (*12th mediation guideline*), not condemning the practice, in order to avoid frustration for those who had not had a regular partner

(7th mediation guideline). Consequently, the mediation guidelines offer scaffolding that contributes to the understanding of the problem and the reduction of learners' stress levels facing these difficulties. Mediator-S supports the students by explaining how the introduction process could be an interesting activity, providing solutions and identifying important aspects, also affirming that such mismatches should be seen as a way to practice the language. Thus, he creates opportunities for participants to reflect on the challenges of their practice and develop their critical capacity (10th mediation guideline).

Considering the different strategies used by mediators when starting and conducting the mediation sessions, we should also observe how the sessions are concluded. Focusing on the organization of a language class, Richards and Lockhart (1994), based on Wong-Fillmore (1985), explain that the way a lesson is started, as well as its sequences and closures, "(...) help frame the event, giving students an idea of what to expect and how to prepare for it." (RICHARDS; LOCKHART, 1994, p. 116). In the following excerpts, it is possible to identify the same strategy for the mediations in which the session closures are observed.

Excerpt 13.

Mediator-E: Girls, do you have any comments to make? Is everything ok? Technical problems? Headsets, images? From here is everything ok? (they nod affirmatively) So, see you next Wednesday, at 4:15 pm, don't be absent, don't be late... If anything happens, you have our Facebook, you have our e-mail, just let us know, okay? Thanks, guys!

Source: Transcription of the mediation conducted by Mediator-E on 10/09/2019.

Excerpt 14.

Mediator-S: So, guys, as our time is over, then we finish like this, we thank you a lot for the session here if you, it was very nice. There are still some cards here, I will read them quickly just to see if we have reached these discussions here, right? (mediator reads the remaining cards). The final questionnaire is there on Moodle, you can answer it so we can compute your information, ok, guys? So thank you very much and see you next session.

Source: Transcription of the mediation conducted by Mediator-S on 04/10/2019.

It is observed that Mediator-E asked if there were any more contributions to be made, before concluding the session and, considering that the participants had no more comments, the excerpt shows that she checked if there were any technical problems regarding the headsets and the camera, making herself available to solve them. In excerpt 14, besides the words of appreciation for everyone's contribution, Mediator-S reads the remaining cards in order to verify that all the topics were addressed. It can be noted, then, that both mediators aimed to establish a reliable and safe atmosphere for the participants (1st mediation guideline). By monitoring the progress of the sessions they ensured that there

were no pending issues, either in technical terms or in relation to the questions brought by the participants in the discussions). Moreover, it is shown that both mediators were also available for the settlement of possible setbacks participants faced.

Furthermore, in excerpt 13, Mediator-E takes the final moments of the mediation to give some warnings, reminding the participants about absences and delays and reaffirming that the social media of the project are available for them to be in contact with the collaborators. Similarly, Mediator-S reminds participants of the final questionnaires, which are part of the dynamics established by the Teletandem project. Thus, mediators provide an opportunity to negotiate the schedules and activities that must be developed in the project, along with the participants (*5th mediation guideline*).

Richards and Lockhart (1994, p. 124) point out that lesson closures are meant to “(a) reinforce what has been learned in a lesson, (b) integrate and review the content of a lesson, and (c) prepare the students for further learning”. These purposes can be found in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 15.

Mediator-S: So, that’s it, guys! Thank you and see you next session, those who can prepare a material, it is always a richer experience, ok? Thank you and see you next week!

Source: Transcription of the mediation conducted by Mediator-S on 03/13/2019.

During the mediation session, the learners had mentioned that communication with their partners presented some gaps. Then, the mediator suggested the elaboration of materials as an alternative to promote conversational progress, since some topics of the partnership’s interest could be agreed upon and developed in the interactions (*6th and 8th mediation guideline*). Thus, at the end of the mediation, he reminds the participants of this support, reinforcing and integrating the discussions, and collaborating with the students' future practices. In relation to the support provided to participants, the mediators were questioned in the interview about how they aimed to promote reflection in this learning context.

Excerpt 16.

Mediator-E: About the reflection assistance, besides the questions I asked, I tried to make the participants talk to each other during the mediation, because the conversation group is a moment for them, with the purpose of sharing their experiences and for this to result in some reflection, I believe I was trying to make the participants comment on everything they thought was important for their learning in Teletandem.

Source: Response of the Mediator-E, interviewed on 04/14/2020.

Excerpt 17.

Mediator-S: To assist the participants I always suggested the idea of creating a kind of portfolio of the

interactions in order to make them observe more clearly and objectively their progress and needs in the interactions.

Source: Response of the Mediator-S, interviewed on 04/14/2020

Mediators are aware of their role in providing scaffolding for reflections in the Teletandem context and they chose different strategies to perform it. They also tried to promote a pleasant environment in which the participants could share all the aspects that they considered important about their experiences, whether positive or negative points (*2nd mediation guideline*). As Mediator-S points out, the interactions could be prepared based on the needs of the participants (*6th mediation guideline*), in such a way that they could visualize their progress and difficulties throughout the sessions, thus reflecting on their performances as learners of the target language and tutors of their native language (or language of proficiency). It is interesting to note that, by means of collaborative supervision (*10th mediation guideline*), Mediator-S suggests the creation of a portfolio, to promote autonomy and aid learners' understanding of their actions, developing a critical capacity as they evaluate the progress and needs of their practice. Additionally, as stated by Mediator-E, the environment of the group conversation is valued and participants have the opportunity to collaborate with each other. This decreases the asymmetry that exists between participant and mediator roles (*3rd mediation guideline*), as they can explore the teaching and learning process together.

From the relationship established between the structure of a lesson (RICHARDS; LOCKHART, 1994) and the way the mediator conducts the mediation sessions, in the interview conducted with each mediator, they were asked these two questions: "What mediation aspects do you believe are helpful to your classroom performance? And how does your classroom experience help you when conducting the mediation sessions?" As Mediator-S did not have much classroom experience, he answered the question by addressing language learning theories he was learning in his undergraduate program, especially the Communicative Approach, and relating them to what he observed in participants' participation in Teletandem. Mediator E reflected on her previous experience as a teacher, as shown in the next excerpt.

Excerpt 18.

Mediator-E: As I am not teaching at the moment, I will bring to my future practice. I believe that listening to the perceptions of the participants will be used as a "thermometer" for me to know how their progress is in the language learning process, by listening to them, I will be aware of their questions, the strategies they use to learn and even to solve some problem/difficulty in their learning. By knowing everything that my student (brings to the teaching practice)/participant feels, the way they stands the opinions, I will be able to better help them, I will have a more accurate look at them, in such way that my teaching practice can meet their needs and me, as a teacher, can lead them according to their needs to learn better. I believe it is a "two-way street" in the sense that the experience in mediation will reflect on my teaching practice, since each participant is a "world", each student is also a "world" too. About my

classroom experience, I think that it helps me to formulate in a more confident, reflective, and critical way the mediation that I conduct, because having already been in some classrooms, this has given me a more refined look at linguistic and cultural issues, that is, I think I can see just a little further than someone who has not yet had teaching experience. Besides, the classroom experience gives me more confidence in talking to the participants, in managing the mediation time, and even when the group doesn't talk much, I can bring them a little more into the conversation, I think this is kind of organic, a result of previous experience.

Source: Response of the Mediator-E, interviewed on 04/14/2020.

Mediator-E's reflection addresses the connections of her teaching abilities across both contexts, the classroom and Teletandem, and illustrates a dynamic and constant transformation, as she explains that her teaching experience helps to ensure that mediation is conducted in a critical and reflective way with a more sophisticated focus on linguistic and cultural aspects. Moreover, she affirms that by supervising the development of the participants during Teletandem, it is possible to identify strategies and difficulties throughout this telecollaborative language learning process (*4th mediation guideline*), which may enable her as a teacher to offer different kinds of assistance that will meet the needs of her future students (*6th mediation guideline*).

In a sociocultural perspective in teacher education, as stated by Vieira-Abrahão (2012), teaching and learning are constituted as a dynamic process of reconstruction and transformation of practices considering both the individual needs and the particular teaching contexts. In this way, mediation in Teletandem constitutes a context for teacher development that places knowledge as intimately and dynamically linked to experience. Mediators' actions are developed according to their experiences as learners and teachers and are influenced by their interactions with participants throughout the mediation sessions, which highlights the role of human agency and social interaction in learning.

It is worth highlighting that fourteen mediation guidelines were found in the data, and the most recurrent ones were the *3rd* and *6th* guidelines (SALOMÃO, 2008), since mediators attempted to offer scaffolding according to participants' needs. The *15th* mediation guideline (SALOMÃO, 2008) was not identified in the data analyzed in this article. It is possible to infer that theoretical readings were not suggested because this practice is not very usual for the participants of this research, since the assistance was based more on mediators' own experiences in conducting the sessions.

Final Considerations

This paper analyzed the strategies used by two mediators of the Teletandem project at UNESP - Araraquara to conduct the mediation sessions, and how the mediation practice benefits foreign language teacher education. Characterized as a more competent partner, the mediator performs the functions pointed out by Figueiredo (2019) in the scaffolding process (WOOD; BRUNER; ROSS, 1976) when

conducting the mediation sessions. The analysis shows that when assisting the participants in reflecting on their practices in this context, they follow the mediation guidelines (SALOMÃO, 2008) by promoting a pleasant environment, reducing participants' stress, offering support based on the needs reported by the participants to solve possible setbacks, proposing activities that reduce the asymmetry between teacher and student roles, aiming to engage participants in reflecting on their learning process, and promoting reflections on the strategies used by the participants and their partners to achieve their goals.

It was noted that the organization and sequencing of themes and activities in a mediation session may be reasonably comparable to the structure of a language class. Mediators propose a plan for the discussions when starting the sessions, organize turn-takings and wrap up by checking if learners have any comments or some technical problems to be solved and giving some important reminders. This helps to structure and organize the event according to students' learning. Even though the mediator does not have the function of teaching specific content, participants bring about and discuss several themes and difficulties, with the objective of deepening topics that were actually brought up during the interactions and encouraging them to reflect on their needs and learning experiences.

In conclusion, based on reflective practice and sociocultural theory, and considering the mediation sessions in the Teletandem project as a context for teacher education (SALOMÃO, 2008; ANDREU-FUNO, 2015; SARTORI, 2021), this paper resonates with previous works and shows how mediation sessions can promote an environment in which mediators have contact with pedagogical practices that can aid in developing and improving teaching abilities. It is important that mediators reflect on their own performance, so that the assistance provided to the learners is increasingly effective, aiming to raise awareness on the strategies used, how they are executed and impact on students' learning in this collaborative context. In this sense, we advocate for language teacher education to systematically focus on the Teletandem context as a locus for pre-service (and in-service) teachers to build a professional identity by articulating theoretical reflection with the domains of practice, and for research to address the conceptions about language, teaching and learning that emerge in mediation sessions.

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