

English Language and Literature Teaching: a State Standards approach
Ensino de Inglês e Literatura: uma abordagem dos Referenciais Curriculares

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Resumo: *Este artigo explora as ideias dos Referenciais Curriculares (Linguagens, Códigos e suas Tecnologias – Língua Estrangeira Moderna), publicados em 2009 pelo Governo do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul, cujos pressupostos buscam mesclar o ensino de Inglês e Literatura através de projetos. Nesse sentido, os Referenciais Curriculares do Rio Grande do Sul e a abordagem de ‘tarefas multigênero’, proposta por Sardinha (2010), serviram como suporte para a elaboração de uma tarefa pedagógica para alunos do Ensino Médio da educação regular. A primeira parte do livro As viagens de Gulliver - Viagem a Lilliput, de Jonathan Swift, foi o principal texto literário utilizado para elaborar a tarefa.*

Palavras-chave: *Ensino de Inglês, Ensino de Literatura, Referenciais Curriculares.*

Abstract: *This paper explores the ideas of the State Standards (Languages, Codes and its Technologies – Modern Foreign Languages), published in 2009 by the Government of Rio Grande do Sul, whose the main idea is to mix Language and Literature teaching through projects. In this sense, the State Standards and the multigenre task approach, suggested by Sardinha (2010), supported the elaboration of a pedagogical task for High-School students (regular education). The first part of Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels – Voyage to Lilliput – was the main literary text used to elaborate the task.*

Key words: *English Language Teaching, Literature Teaching, State Standards.*

1 INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of this work is to show how the State Standards may work, joining the teaching of Language and Literature. It is one of the newest linguistic references, made especially for Rio Grande do Sul, for the teachers and students of this Brazilian state and their needs. According to the State Standards (RS, 2009¹)

¹ This and all the other quotations, originally written in Portuguese, which will appear throughout this text, have been translated by the author of the present paper. Original: “a aprendizagem de línguas é um direito de todo o cidadão, entendendo que, através de oportunidades para envolverem-se com textos relevantes em outras línguas, os educandos poderão compreender melhor a sua própria realidade e aprender a transitar com desenvoltura, flexibilidade e autonomia no mundo em que vivem e, assim, serem indivíduos cada vez mais atuantes na sociedade contemporânea, caracterizada pela diversidade e complexidade cultural”.

language learning is a right of all citizens, in the sense that through opportunities to get involved with relevant texts in other languages, students will be able to better understand their own reality and learn how to move in an easy, flexible and autonomous fashion in the world they live in and, thus, be increasingly more active citizens in the contemporary society, characterized by diversity and cultural complexity.

I see no better way to use these ideas than using Literature as a source to teach language. It is a very effective way for the students to get in touch with relevant texts of the target language. Using Literature to teach English provides students with an opportunity to practice reading and comprehension skills, and, mainly, to develop critical thinking and have new perceptions of the world they live in (ultimately, literacy). The ways of using this source are many and can be seen in various perspectives. I believe the one suggested here is very effective because it involves not only Language and Literature, but also what other media and texts are around it, social practices are valued in Education. The goal is that a task must make a difference in the students' life as citizens.

According to Kleiman (1995), the ability to understand other uses of writing than the basic ones (habitual writing) opens new possibilities to access other worlds, audiences, institutions such as new media, bureaucracy and technology; and throw them access power.

To show how it all works, I made a task based on it using, mainly, the first part of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels - Voyage to Lilliput*. My intention is to show that ideas of the State Standards and Sardinha's multi-genre task approach may work very well together.

2 THE STATE STANDARDS

In this part of the paper, it will be shown the main final product connected with the teaching of Additional Languages in schools, suggested by the State Standards.

What is perceptible is that the aim/objective/final product of Additional Language teaching should be "directed to social practices, especially to literate social practices, required of citizens of contemporary societies" (RS, 2009²). This concept is supported by many arguments; to the comprehension of the idea, two that are very important:

- The first one is that the objective of Additional Languages teaching at school is *not* to form a proficient student, otherwise, as exemplified in the State Standards, all disciplines should form specialists of their own areas (such as biologist for biology, gymnasts for physical education, etc.).

² Original: "com vistas às práticas sociais, sobretudo às práticas sociais letradas, exigidas do cidadão na contemporaneidade".

- The second argument refers to an objective of this discipline: Additional Language teaching should help students to *solve problems*. It makes us think about what the students need to do, effectively, with the language they learn in school. The objective is *not* to use the language in a distant future or learn it because it is important; the objective is to *use the language to solve problems daily, for instance, read a manual or playing the video-game*.

With all these and other arguments written on the document, it's very clear that there is a direction of Additional Language teaching to something *more social* than to learn only syntactic rules or verb tenses. Therefore, the Additional Language teaching should be directed to these social purposes that require writing in many ways.

3 MULTI-GENRE TASKS

To elaborate the task two main parameters were used: the State Standards themselves and a Sardinha's (2010) suggestion of "multigenre tasks". According to Sardinha (2010), the main idea is to use authentic material to approach many genres. Accordingly, teachers and students are more exposed to texts which at the same time, become part of their day-to-day life. This kind of task is important because the students have to deal with a wide range of texts in their life, conveyed in many media. So, it is significant to bring inside the classroom some reality, things that students do daily.

In a very handy way, the multi-genre task brings new characteristics that are similar to the State Standards. There are many genres that can be inserted in a task, such as written genres (cartoons, books, magazines, etc.) and media (world wide web, e-mail, twitter, facebook, etc.). This kind of task is very effective to develop citizens who are able to interact with the world. According to Sardinha (2010³)

The classroom must, then, enable students to have a good performance when in contact with these genres, under penalty of being overtaken, and as we know, accused of being an anachronistic and discouraging place, not to mention that the status of being a training site for citizens able to face the challenges of an increasingly globalized, digital and in transformation society may be questioned.

³ Original: A sala de aula precisa, então, capacitar os alunos a terem bom desempenho no contato com esses gêneros, sob pena de ficar ultrapassada e, como já sabemos, acusada de ser um lugar anacrônico e desestimulante; sem falar que pode ser questionada em relação a constituir um local de formação de cidadãos capazes de enfrentar os desafios de uma sociedade cada vez mais globalizada, digital e em transformação.

Another very important characteristic of this kind of task, pointed out by Sardinha (2010), is that genres interact with each other, usually around a social activity or subject. For example: if someone wants to perform the activity “edit a picture”, that person will have to get in touch with many texts, such as the manual of the program that will be used, maybe a YouTube tutorial video, a Wikipedia text, etc. It all should be brought inside the classroom; after all, this kind of activity is what we do.

The main concern is to organize these genres in tasks and/or projects so as to make the students learn how to solve problems through the texts presented to them. According to the State Standards, the aim of the school is not proficiency, but it is to teach the students *how and when they will have to use the language they are learning*.

Joining both ideas, thinking about Language and Literature teaching, the aim of the tasks that will be elaborated for the students is not always to read full books or very long texts, but parts of them, proposing the students to understand the main plot and link it to linguistic and social features and mainly, it should help them to solve a problem. It may provoke an interest of reading the full book, even in other languages than the target one; what is even good because it all starts to form literate people; and readers.

The main idea that Sardinha (2010) states is that this kind of task is not to become proficient students in this or that genre, but it is to teach them to interact with different genres in order to have linguistic elements which allow them to perform the focused social activity, that depends on many genres.

4 THE TASK

The following task was based on the multi-genre task approach and adapted to the objectives of the State Standards. The theme proposed is “travelling and new cultures” and the main text used for it is the first part of Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels – Voyage to Lilliput*.

The task is directed to students who are finishing regular high school (intermediate students). The general objective is to interact with many genres (such as the original text, YouTube videos, WikiTexts, etc.) related to the core theme of the task. The specific objective (*very important for evaluation*) is to study linguistic features used when talking about “travelling and new cultures” through the texts presented to the students. To perform the task, it will be needed a computer laboratory or a projector.

The task is divided in five main parts:

1. There are some warming-up activities about the main topic – such as information and research about culture and other places.

2. The second part starts to talk about *Gulliver's Travels*. There is some information about the book and an attempt to create curiosity, trying to make the students want to read the book. There is also one part of the original book and the students are asked to talk about it and highlight some cultural aspects.
3. The activity presented in this part is about linguistic patterns. The aim is to think about the words the students didn't understand and discover what they mean.
4. Here, other genres and media are presented to the students.
5. The last part is a group activity. It is the students' turn to find out about other texts/genres/media.

The task shown here is not a “role model” of how tasks should be, it is an attempt to see the State Standards working through a task. The activities within the task should be changed to the purposes of the class and to the level of the students.

TRAVELLING AND NEW CULTURES



PART 1

When people travel to other places, they may realize that some things are different from their own places. Try to define, in the following scheme, things that you believe are typical in the place you live:

LIST HERE CULTURAL ASPECTS FROM YOUR PLACE	

Do you think there is a cultural correspondence with other places? Try to remember different places and what you know about their culture.

Sometimes, people experience prejudice because of their culture. Where, how and why do you think this happens?

Work in pairs. Talk about the following issues and report to the class:

1. Why do people travel?
2. What do they do when they are travelling?
3. Where did you go on your last trip?
4. What was culturally different from your place?
5. What place would you like to visit? Why? What do you know about this place?
6. If you were taken to a place you know nothing about, what would you do first?

Now that you know something about the story, read the following passage:

These people are most excellent mathematicians, and arrived to a great perfection in mechanics, by the countenance and encouragement of the emperor, who is a renowned patron of learning. This prince has several machines fixed on wheels, for the carriage of trees and other great weights. He often builds his largest men of war, whereof some are nine feet long, in the woods where the timber grows, and has them carried on these engines three or four hundred yards to the sea. Five hundred carpenters and engineers were immediately set at work to prepare the greatest engine they had. It was a frame of wood raised three inches from the ground, about seven feet long, and four wide, moving upon twenty two wheels. The shout I heard was upon the arrival of this engine, which, it seems, set out in four hours after my landing. It was brought parallel to me,

as I lay. But the principal difficulty was to raise and place me in this vehicle. Eighty poles, each of one foot high, were erected for this purpose, and very strong cords, of the bigness of packthread, were fastened by hooks to many bandages, which the workmen had girt round my neck, my hands, my body, and my legs. Nine hundred of the strongest men were employed to draw up these cords, by many pulleys fastened on the poles; and thus, in less than three hours, I was raised and slung into the engine, and there tied fast. All this I was told; for, while the operation was performing, I lay in a profound sleep, by the force of that soporiferous medicine infused into my liquor. Fifteen hundred of the emperor's largest horses, each about four inches and a half high, were employed to draw me towards the metropolis, which, as I said, was half a mile distant.

There are some cultural characteristics that the citizens from Lilliput show in this passage. What do you highlight? Where do you think they will take Gulliver?

PART 3

In groups, find words that you didn't understand. Set up a small glossary. Try to understand what they mean and, if you don't discover it, look some concordances lines at corpus.byu.edu/coca/. Ask for help if you need.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

PART 4

There are many media that talk about and represent the story of the book in many ways. One of them is a movie based on *Gulliver's Travels*, which was released in 2011. Visit "The Internet Movie Database" (www.imdb.com) and find information about the movie. Write down important things about it (such as stars, plot, director, curiosities, etc.). If you want to add some pictures and extra material to your work, feel free.

Now watch the trailer of the movie on YouTube:

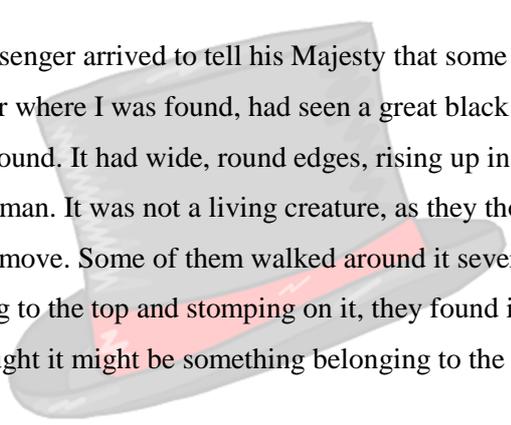
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhOXLhnTNNM>

After watching the trailer, answer:

What aspects would you like to highlight about the trailer? Is there anything you noticed about the culture of that society that is very different from ours? What?

How do you think Gulliver's life is? Do you think it is similar in the book? Try to find something in it. The book is available at "The Project Gutenberg. (<http://www.gutenberg.org/>) – find it.

Read the passage in which the Lilliputians describe Gulliver's hat as it must have looked to them.



. . . a messenger arrived to tell his Majesty that some of his subjects, riding near where I was found, had seen a great black substance lying on the ground. It had wide, round edges, rising up in the middles as high as a man. It was not a living creature, as they thought at first. It did not move. Some of them walked around it several times, and climbing to the top and stomping on it, they found it was hollow. They thought it might be something belonging to the Man Mountain.

Now it's your turn: Using this passage as a model, describe an ordinary object (not a plant or animal) with a new point of view. Describe it as if you were a Lilliputian and have no idea what it is used for.

Hint: Choose a simple object or it will take too long to describe. Be ready to read your descriptions aloud and let classmates guess the object.

Now read your classmates' descriptions and try to discover what they described.

In the web, try to find in the web other media about *Gulliver's Travels*.

What kind of texts/media did you find?

Group activity:

Select a key subject connected with the book and find stuff about it. After that, prepare a power-point presentation to your classmates.

Suggestions:

- 1) Make a travel itinerary and underline the most important places to visit. Talk about the local culture.
- 2) Find out about specific cultures that you don't know about your city/state/country.
- 3) Try to know more about *Gulliver's Travels* and its repercussions.

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