

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Roll a D6: a role-playing game based approach to the EFL classroom

Fabian Quevedo da Rocha¹

¹ Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil.

ABSTRACT

This article describes the benefits of using Role-playing games (RPGs) in EFL learning contexts. It is divided in three main parts: the first part introduces the concept and origins of RPGs and briefly discusses their communicative and collaborative aspects; the second part approaches the RPG systematic to the concepts of communicative language teaching (CLT), task based learning (TBL), and active learning as a means to demonstrate how EFL learners can benefit from an approach that involves RPGs; the third part describes and discusses the learning outcomes of a set of RPG based tasks that were developed and used in an EFL context with a group of nine teenagers aging from 12 to 17 years old during their fourth semester in a language school. The article closes with considerations on how RPG based learning can help learners develop not only their speaking and interpersonal skills, but also autonomy.

KEYWORDS: Active learning; Communicative language teaching; EFL; RPG.

Role um D6: uma abordagem baseada em role-playing games para a sala de aula de inglês como língua estrangeira

RESUMO

Este artigo descreve os benefícios do uso de Role-Playing games (RPGs) em contextos de aprendizagem de inglês como língua estrangeira. Ele está dividido em três partes principais: a primeira parte introduz o conceito e as origens dos RPGs e discute brevemente seu aspecto comunicativo e colaborativo; a segunda parte aproxima a sistemática do RPG dos conceitos de ensino comunicativo de língua, aprendizagem baseada em tarefas e aprendizagem ativa como um meio de demonstrar como os alunos de inglês como língua estrangeira podem se beneficiar de uma abordagem que envolve RPGs; a terceira parte descreve e discute os resultados de aprendizagem de um conjunto de tarefas baseadas em RPG que foram desenvolvidas e usadas em um contexto de inglês como língua estrangeira, com um grupo de nove adolescentes de 12 a 17 anos cursando o quarto semestre em uma escola de idiomas. O artigo termina com considerações sobre como a aprendizagem baseada em RPG pode ajudar os alunos a desenvolver não apenas suas habilidades de conversação e relacionamento interpessoal, mas também autonomia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Aprendizagens ativas; Ensino comunicativo de línguas; Inglês como língua estrangeira; RPG.

Corresponding Author:

FABIAN QUEVEDO DA ROCHA
<fabianway07@gmail.com>



This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original publication is properly cited.
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper offer teachers my experience in implementing a table-top role-playing game designed to develop students' speaking and interpersonal skills in EFL classrooms. The idea for the project was born from the belief that in order to enable learning to take place effectively and more powerfully, not only must learners feel safe, but they also need to feel they are heard and cared for. As an educator, I have always had learner-centered pedagogies at the core of my teaching practices, thus experimenting with an approach that prompted students to take a more active part in their learning process seemed to be a promising investment.

Among the benefits of RPGs, Bowman (2010) highlights the safe and considerably consequence-free space in which the players are able to develop a series of aspects, such as empathy, personal, interpersonal, cognitive, and also occupational skills. In addition to that, when the author discusses the importance of role-playing, she calls attention to three basic functions the practice offers: (1) as it provides narrative enactment within a ritual framework, it is capable of enhancing a group's sense of communal cohesiveness; (2) it encourages complex problem-solving, and (3) by a process known as identity alteration, it provides players with an opportunity to enact alternate personas. Despite these positive considerations, RPGs are still regarded as non-serious activities, both in leisure and educational practices. For Ghazal & Singh (2016), such skepticism, that is not directed towards RPGs only, but to most practices that involve games, has to do, to a considerable extent, with the traditional concept of education that regards learning and playing as opposites. In this sense, this article also discusses the benefits of approaching RPGs practices to the EFL classrooms.

The project I discuss in this paper was divided in three phases: during phase 1, learners focused on creating an alternate persona (character) that they would interpret in the third phase of the project. There were no restrictions concerning the characteristics learners should give to their characters. As long as they were careful enough to respect each other, they were free to use their creativity. For the second phase of the project, students had to create an avatar for their characters: it could be either handmade or designed at avatarmaker.com¹. The third phase consisted of three role-playing tasks that are described later in this work. The tasks were proposed to a group of nine teenagers aging from 12 to 17 years old during their fourth semester in a language school.

The mechanics (available skills dice rolling to perform specific actions, etc.) of the game played in the project were adapted from the *Generic Universal Role-Playing System (GURPS)*, which is discussed further on in this research. I decided to use just the essential mechanics of the system in order to avoid confusing learners that were not acquainted with RPGs and also to maximise the time spent on the role-playing itself, which was the focus of the project.

Although this project was developed and used in a language school context, the activities designed are not limited to it: all and each of them

¹ <<https://avatarmaker.com>> is a website that allows one to create and download personalized avatars for free.

require few resources and may be easily adapted to a variety of contexts. In addition to that, even though the activities described here were used in an EFL classroom, they may also be used with other foreign languages and to teach other subjects as well.

2. INTRODUCING THE BASICS OF ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

Role-playing games were first developed in the early 1970s as a form of leisure. In an RPG, players create a character and impersonate it in a story that is collaboratively constructed while the game is played. There are no fixed objectives in an RPG, nor there must be winners or losers: during an RPG match, players perform a variety of realistic tasks, together or on their own, as a means to solve a specific problem. The problem-like situations proposed in an RPG are called quests and they serve as tools to keep the story flowing, since once the players complete one quest they are presented another, often more complex, one. The quests may vary from simply cooking dinner, to performing first aid.

There is a considerable number of RPG systems available for use, each offering different degrees of complexity and reality. The discussions in this article will use *GURPS* as reference since one of the main objectives of its basic rule system is to emphasize realism. This specific characteristic of such system, created by Steve Jackson in 1986, allows it to fit any situation, whether historical or fantasy like, whether it takes place in the present, past, or future. Prior to Jackson's, most RPGs' systems offered little or no room for flexibility or choice: they were genre-driven, which meant that players had to learn a new set of rules whenever they wanted to play in a different scenario or reality. With the emergence of *GURPS*, players were able to set their game in any imaginable background without having to worry about studying the system's specificities over and over, which allowed them more time for role-playing, one of the chief aims of RPGs. Jackson (1993) says that when he developed *GURPS* he had three main objectives: he wanted the system to be flexible, as it would be expected of a system that carries the world "universal" in its name; it also had to include a considerable amount of detail so that the role-playing could get as close as possible to real life interactions. Jackson believed that in order to be realistic, an RPG system should be well-organized as to allow players to quickly and easily find any rule in the book. The author also wanted *GURPS* to offer ease of play: "most of the detailed calculations are done before you start play ... they are entered on the character sheet, and saved until you need them. Once play actually begins, it should not be complex" (Jackson, 1993, p. 6).

Few resources are needed to play a match of RPG: basically paper, writing material, a set of dice and the basic set book of the system chosen. Players may choose between playing alone (solo campaigns) or in groups (group campaigns), the latter being more desirable since it fosters interaction and collaboration. In group campaigns, one of the players assumes the role of the Game Master (GM), the person responsible for setting the nature of the adventure (real life, fantasy, futuristic, etc) and for mediating the game. Once the nature of the campaign is set, the players must create the characters they intend to interpret: they need to define their character's names, appearance

(height, weight, etc.), history (origins, occupation, objectives, etc.), innate abilities (charisma, empathy, etc.), limitations (bad temper, compulsive behaviour, shyness etc.), quirks (sleeping early, avoiding crowded places, etc.), skills (swimming, acting, playing an instrument, etc), and also their basic attributes (levels of intelligence, physical strength, dexterity, and vitality). To prevent players from creating unrealistic characters (too many innate abilities and skills, and few or no limitations), they are given a specific amount of points to exchange for skills, innate abilities, and basic attributes, e.g.: a player wants their character to know economics, law, and first aid. However, these three skills together would cost them more points than they can afford. Consequently, the player opts for only two of the skills. Figure 1 shows an example of how a GURPS character sheet looks like when finished.


GURPS CHARACTER SHEET		Name	Date Created	Sequence																																																
		ROBYN of the MEADOWS Player																																																		
		Appearance 5'6", 130 LBS., FAIR SKIN, RED HAIR	Unspent Points	Point Total																																																
		Character Story COUNTRY KID LOOKING FOR WEALTH IN THE BIG CITY.		100																																																
Pt. Cost	ST 11	FATIGUE																																																		
40	DX 14	BASIC DAMAGE																																																		
95	IQ 13	Thrust: <u>sd-1</u> Swing: <u>sd-1</u>																																																		
30	HT 11	HITS TAKEN																																																		
10	Mvmt 6.25	MOVE 6	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>SKILLS</th> <th>Pt. Cost</th> <th>Level</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>KNIFE</td><td>4</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>KNIFE THROWING</td><td>1</td><td>14</td></tr> <tr><td>ACROBATICS</td><td>2</td><td>13</td></tr> <tr><td>FIRST-TALK</td><td>2</td><td>13</td></tr> <tr><td>LOCKPICKING</td><td>2</td><td>13</td></tr> <tr><td>PICKPOCKET</td><td>2</td><td>13</td></tr> <tr><td>STEALTH</td><td>4</td><td>15</td></tr> <tr><td>STREETWISE</td><td>4</td><td>14</td></tr> <tr><td>JEWELER</td><td>2</td><td>12</td></tr> <tr><td>MERCHANT</td><td>2</td><td>13</td></tr> </tbody> </table>		SKILLS	Pt. Cost	Level	KNIFE	4	10	KNIFE THROWING	1	14	ACROBATICS	2	13	FIRST-TALK	2	13	LOCKPICKING	2	13	PICKPOCKET	2	13	STEALTH	4	15	STREETWISE	4	14	JEWELER	2	12	MERCHANT	2	13															
SKILLS	Pt. Cost	Level																																																		
KNIFE	4	10																																																		
KNIFE THROWING	1	14																																																		
ACROBATICS	2	13																																																		
FIRST-TALK	2	13																																																		
LOCKPICKING	2	13																																																		
PICKPOCKET	2	13																																																		
STEALTH	4	15																																																		
STREETWISE	4	14																																																		
JEWELER	2	12																																																		
MERCHANT	2	13																																																		
	ENCUMBRANCE	PASSIVE DEFENSE																																																		
	None (0) = 2xST 22 Light (1) = 4xST 44 Med (2) = 6xST 66 Hvy (3) = 12xST 132 X-Hvy (4) = 20xST 220	Armor: _____ Shield: _____ Saves: _____																																																		
	ACTIVE DEFENSES	WEAPONS AND POSSESSIONS																																																		
	DODGE 6 PARRY 7 BLOCK X	Item Damage Skill # Wt. Type Acc. Level LARGE KNIFE CUT <u>sd-1</u> 16 40 1 imp <u>sd-1</u> DAGGERS (2) imp <u>sd-2</u> 16 200 1/2 CLOTHES (middle-class) 40 1 SHOES 40 2 JEWELLED RINGS 200 -																																																		
	DAMAGE RESISTANCE	At home:																																																		
	Armor (SHOES) : (1) Saves: _____	TWO CHANGES OF CLOTHING 80 BURIED SILVER 60 CATS																																																		
Pt. Cost	ADVANTAGES, DISADVANTAGES, QUIRKS	Totals \$ 500 Lbs 4 1/2	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>WEAPON RANGES</th> <th>SS</th> <th>Acc</th> <th>WD</th> <th>Max</th> <th>Point Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>THROWN KNIFE</td><td>11</td><td>0</td><td>9</td><td>18</td><td>95</td></tr> <tr><td>THROWN DAGGER</td><td>11</td><td>0</td><td>6</td><td>11</td><td>20</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="5">Advantages</td><td>-35</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="5">Disadvantages</td><td>-5</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="5">Quirks</td><td>25</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="5">Skills</td><td>25</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="5">TOTAL</td><td>100</td></tr> </tbody> </table>		WEAPON RANGES	SS	Acc	WD	Max	Point Total	THROWN KNIFE	11	0	9	18	95	THROWN DAGGER	11	0	6	11	20	Advantages					-35	Disadvantages					-5	Quirks					25	Skills					25	TOTAL					100
WEAPON RANGES	SS	Acc			WD	Max	Point Total																																													
THROWN KNIFE	11	0			9	18	95																																													
THROWN DAGGER	11	0			6	11	20																																													
Advantages					-35																																															
Disadvantages					-5																																															
Quirks					25																																															
Skills					25																																															
TOTAL					100																																															
10	ALERTNESS +2																																																			
10	NIGHT VISION																																																			
-10	PHOBIA - Insects																																																			
-10	STRUGGLING (1/2 normal wear/1lb)																																																			
-15	GREEDY																																																			
-1	LOVES GEMS AND JEWELS																																																			
-1	CLAIMS TO BE PART ELF																																																			
-1	DISLIKES AUTHORITY																																																			
-1	LIKES CATS																																																			
-1	DISLIKES CITY BUT FINDS IT FASCINATING																																																			
0	ILLITERATE!																																																			

Figure 1. GURPS character sheet model

As it can be seen, the most basic information about a GURPS character (name, appearance, history, etc.) is found at the upper part of the character's

sheet. In this part, the number of points spent to create the character is also presented. Standard characters in a *GURPS* game are normally created with 100 points, but the GM may define a different standard in order to make the campaigns more challenging. On the left part, players should write their character's basic attributes (strength, dexterity, intelligence, and health) as well as their innate abilities, limitations, and quirks. The numbers preceding the characteristics in these sections refer to the amount of points a player spent to acquire them. Other features in this part of the sheet include the character's speed, the amount of weight they are capable of carrying, and also battle-related features that are used in situations of physical confrontation. Players use the right part of the sheet almost exclusively to write their character's skills as well as the amount of points paid for each skill and the level of ability the character has in each of them (higher levels indicate higher proficiency, and vice versa.) The character's avatar and its belongings are located in the central part of the sheet. The sheet learners used in the project is presented in **Figure 2**. It was adapted from the *GURPS* sheet and it was simplified as to allow learners to make game decisions without having to worry about the wide variety of options available in the original system.

Student's Name: <u> </u>	Group: <u>Reach Out 1</u>
Character's Name: <u>Meredith</u>	Age: <u>35</u>

Personal Info: <u>American, works as a surgeon in a hospital. From Seattle. Nickname: Mer. Widowed. Has 3 Kids.</u>		History: <u>Raised by her mother who was also a surgeon. Studied at a good medical school. Survived a plane crash.</u>
Abilities: <u>Medicine skills, working under pressure, multitasking, solving problems, resilience, readiness.</u>	Likes and Dislikes: <u>Working, children, being with friends. Doesn't like cooking.</u>	Personality: <u>Intelligent. Not very patient. Strong willed.</u>

Appearance: <u>Long blond hair, tall, blue eyes, wears glasses, fair skin, thin.</u>

Figure 2. Student's character sheet

One of the most relevant characteristics of RPGs is that all campaigns are played verbally. In this sense, the focus is always on communication: a standard RPG match starts with the GM describing a situation to the players and telling them what they hear and see. Visual (maps, drawings, etc.) and auditory (atmosphere music) input may be used to help players immerse in the story and also to create a feeling of realism. After hearing the GM's description, each player announces what they are going to do and how they are going to do it. When all players have performed their actions and the GM described the outcomes, a new round begins. It is important to note, however, that some actions in an RPG are conditioned to ability or skill tests: imagine a person wants to sell a product. It may be argued that the chances this person has of succeeding are, to a large extent, connected to the amount of experience he or she has in selling: the more experienced the person is, the greater the chances of success. Both in *GURPS* and in the project described here, the ability and skill tests were made by rolling 3 six-faced dice (D6); the character's success or failure was determined by the number showed in the dice as compared to the character's level of ability in that specific skill. For example, imagine Robyn of the Meadows (the character in **Figure 1**) wants to pick a lock: her level of ability in lock picking is 13. To check whether the character will be able to pick that specific lock, the player in control of the character has to roll 3 D6. If the number showed in the dice is 13 or lower, the character succeeds; otherwise, she fails and the GM tells the player why they failed (they were too nervous, the equipment they were using was not appropriate, etc.).

It is important to highlight that RPGs matches are often long, thus, it is important not only that teachers plan the classes carefully, but also that they have clear and straightforward objectives for each task so that the transition between tasks run smoothly and students' motivation remain high.

3. APPROACHING RPGS TO THE EFL TEACHING AND LEARNING

Having briefly discussed the basics of what RPGs are about, the benefits of an RPG approach to EFL classes have still to be accounted for. In a scenario where playing games is often believed to be an educationally unproductive activity (Ghazal & Singh, 2016) and where the demands for educational practices that are liberating and promote learners' autonomy are increasing, studying and investing in approaches that stimulate critical thinking and cooperation seems relevant.

Freire (1996) argues that there are some kinds of knowledge that are fundamental to the critical educative practice. For the author, the very first of these kinds of knowledge, fundamental to teachers that consider themselves agents in the production of knowledge, is that teaching does not mean simply transferring knowledge, but rather creating possibilities for its production and construction. In addition to that, the scholar believes that practice assumes an essential role in the learning process. In this sense, it is through practice that learners confirm, modify, or amplify the different kinds of knowledge involved in different practices. In other words, learning has to be active; it has to take the opposite direction of what Freire calls *banking education*, which involves the mere transference of knowledge from

one person to another with no critical reflection. Passive approaches such as this one, as Ghazal & Singh (2016) believe, reduce language learning to merely a process of re-production and do not allow co-creation of knowledge.

A role-playing game approach to English teaching, on the other hand, goes toward what Freire (2005) refers to as *authentic education*, which means that "education is not carried on by 'A' for 'B' or by 'A' about 'B', but rather by 'A' with 'B', mediated by the world – a world that impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it". In addition to that,

roleplaying teaches cooperation among the players, and broadens their viewpoints. But it's not purely educational. It's also one of the most creative possible entertainments. The major difference between roleplaying and other types of entertainment is this: Most entertainment is passive. The audience just sits and watches, without taking part in the creative process. But in roleplaying, the "audience" joins in the creation. While the GM is the chief storyteller, the players are responsible for creating their own characters. And if they want something to happen in the story, they *make* it happen, because they're in the story (Jackson, 1993, p. 8).

It may be argued, then, that besides being a way of implementing learner-centered pedagogy and promoting active learning, the use of RPGs in the EFL classroom is also likely to enhance learning quality since, as Resnik (2004) believes, one learns and enjoys the most when one is engaged as an active participant, rather than as a passive recipient. When teaching is learner-centered and prompts students to assume an active role in the learning process, teachers' struggle to engage their students and get them talking decreases. In approaches like these, teachers assume the role of mediators, facilitators, and also "complicators". In other words, in an RPG based approach, teachers' role is to offer the proper scaffolding (i.e., guide learners towards greater understanding and, consequently, greater independence in the learning process) so that learning may take place more effectively.

The benefits of using RPG based tasks in the EFL classroom are intrinsically connected to Kapp's (2012) definition of the term "game" in an educational context: for the author, a game is a space composed of a variety of converging factors, namely players, abstract thinking, challenges, rules, interactivity, feedback, quantifiable results, and emotional reaction, all found within a structured system. In addition to that, in their study concerning game-based language learning, Ghazal & Singh (2016, p. 3-5) argue that games are relevant to language learning in the sense that they (1) promote learner-centered pedagogy, (2) ensure engagement, (3) provide motivation, (4) foster creativity, (5) instil empathy and social skills, (6) are cost-effective, (7) create a zone of proximal development², and (8) promote co-creation of knowledge. In this sense, a RPG based approach seems to offer possible solutions to a series of old problems teachers face in language classrooms: students' lack of motivation, excessive teacher talking time, teacher-dependent students, classroom management, among others.

RPGs have a task-based nature. In this research, tasks are understood as classroom activities that (1) focus on meaning rather than on form,

² Concept introduced by Lev Vygotsky to refer to what learners are able to accomplish on their own as opposed to what they can achieve with the help of a more experienced other.

(2) have a clear purpose, (3) produce an outcome that may be shared with other people, and relate to real-life situations. Therefore, due to such nature, RPGs tend to help learners see the applicability of what they are learning in the sense that as students engage in the life-like situations proposed in the role-playing, they are, somehow, learning and using the language to do things in the world, which is exactly the focus of task-based learning: provide learners with opportunities to use authentic language for genuine communication. Another important benefit of the use of RPGs in the EFL classroom that is worth mentioning is that RPGs are an inclusive practice not only in the sense that they provide a safe and consequence-free space for students to learn, but also in the sense that it comprehends a wide set of learning styles: visual (maps, drawings, and avatars are often used), aural (atmosphere music and sound effects can be used during the matches), verbal (RPGs are played verbally), physical (players may resort to kinesthetic practices during the role-playing), logical (RPGs propose a variety of problem-solving situations), and social (players must interact during the matches).

4. RPGS AND THE EFL CLASSROOM: PROPOSED AND IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP SPEAKING AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

This section describes a set of role-playing based tasks conducted in an EFL classroom as part of a project to develop students' speaking and interpersonal skills. The teacher, in the role of the Game Master, mediated the three RPG matches the students played. One of the aims of the project was to provide students with an opportunity to use the foreign language in life-like situations, thus building their confidence and autonomy as well as preparing them to use the language to do things in the world.

4.1 Activity 1: Getting to know each other

The first task of the project consisted of asking the students to create a new identity for themselves: in the first class they were asked to invent a name for this new identity; then, every subsequent class they would create a new aspect of their characters (origin, age, background, personality, abilities, etc). All the information about the characters was stored in a character's sheet the students were given in the first class (**Figure 2**). Once the players had their new identities ready, the GM proposed the first role-playing situation: "you are at a social gathering. When you talk to someone, remember to act as the persona you have created. If during your interaction with the other people at the gathering you happen to be asked a question about an aspect of your character that you had not previously established, you should improvise. One of the key aspects of role-playing is improvisation." Players were, then, given a few minutes to interact with one another and, after that, they were prompted to introduce the people they had met at the social event to the other players. At the end of the task, learners reported feeling more confident and at ease to talk about themselves in the target language. It could also be observed that students developed fluency and accuracy to introduce themselves and to share their basic information.

4.2 Activity 2: Rainforest survival expedition

While the first task focused on prompting players to get to know each other's characters, for the second activity the GM proposed a more collaborative and problem-solving situation: after having met, the players decided to go camping in a rainforest. Before starting the trip, however, the players had to make the arrangements, which consisted of choosing their trip partners, deciding which equipment to take, and also selecting the skills their characters would need for the expedition. Players were free to decide with whom they would like to go camping, however, to make the task more challenging, the number of items each group was allowed to take to the trip was decided on the dice, as it can be seen in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Relation between number shown on dice and the amount of items players are allowed to take

Number shown on dice	Number of items group was allowed to take
3-4	Group can take everything they want
5-7	Group can take 10 items
8-10	Group can take 8 items
11-13	Group can take 5 items
14-16	Group can take 3 items
17-18	Group cannot take anything

After rolling the dice to decide the quantity of supplies each group was allowed to take, they had to choose among the items on the following list: a map, a compass, a rope, a backpack, a satellite phone, sleeping bags, sunglasses, sunscreen, gloves, a flashlight, a stove, a tent, insect repellent, a helmet, a first aid kit, waterproof clothes, food/water.

Having decided what to take, the players had also to decide which abilities each of them would choose. Each player was allowed to choose two abilities from this list: swimming, hunting/fishing, performing first aid, reading maps, canoeing, night vision, climbing/using a rope, cooking/lighting a fire, biology/botany skills. Since players were going camping in trios, the decision about which skills to take had to be made collaboratively so that the trio could better face the adversities of the rainforest.

The last part of the activity focused on the role-play more specifically: the groups were already in the rainforest and they had to perform a set of tasks there. The tasks each group had to perform were decided on the dice as shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Role-playing situations

Number shown on the dice	Task to be performed
3-4	You are hungry and thirsty. If you do not have water or food, you need to search for these things in the forest.
5-7	Your friend fell into a river and he/she does not know how to swim. Help your friend.
8-10	Your friend is very sick. You need to cross the river and take him/her to the hospital.
11-13	The campers in the southern region of the forest need help. They do not have a first aid kit/food. Take these things to them.
14-16	There is a snake in your tent. You have to enter the tent to take the first aid kit to help your injured friend.
17-18	Your friend fell into a hole and you need to help him/her climb out of it.

As it can be seen in **Table 2** above, all the tasks players had to perform focused on problem situations which prompted them to work collaboratively to find the solutions. As they performed the tasks, their actions were guided by their characters' personalities, abilities and limitations. At the end of the task, even though learners had never camped, they could have an idea of how a camping trip in a rainforest could be like. In addition to that, the students also learned about the importance of group work, which could be observed during the next classes: as learners seemed to be more aware of their classmates' limitations, they started to be more willing to help each other. To what grammar is concerned, with the accomplishing of the task it could be observed that learners gained a better control over the language they needed to perform the task (e.g.: modal verbs such as *can*, *could* and *must* to talk about ability, possibility, necessity, to ask for help, etc.).

4.3 Activity 3: Introducing Home Economics

The third and final task of the project provided learners with an opportunity to get to know the basics of Home Economics. The GM first asked players how many of them had already had the opportunity to plan and do the monthly grocery shopping. None of them had. After that the GM proposed that the players got together in trios and imagined their characters were living together and they had to make the grocery shopping decisions. Then, the trios discussed the budget they should be allowed to have for the task. It was agreed that each trio would have no more than a R\$ 400. 00 budget to do the shopping. The GM, then, distributed brochures of different local supermarkets, so that the players had the necessary input to carry out the task. Players had to discuss and take notes of their choices as well as make the calculations referring to the shopping. After some minutes had elapsed, the GM asked the trios to present and justify their decisions to the rest of the group. All trios were able to design a reasonable shopping list that not only was within their budget, but that also seemed to meet their characters' monthly needs. When the task was over, learners reported that they felt confident to ask their parents to organize the next monthly grocery shopping and that they had learned the importance of planning before shopping in order to avoid unnecessary expenses and also to be able to save money for future projects. In addition to that, the students said that not only did the task help them expand their vocabulary about the topic, but it also helped them use grammatical structures such as quantifiers and countable and uncountable nouns more accurately and naturally.

5. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FURTHER WORK

A role-playing game based approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language is an effective way of making learning more meaningful and engaging as it offers a possible solution to the frequent lack of interest among learners, one of the biggest challenges teachers face (Ghazal & Singh, 2016). In addition to that, due to its communicative and task-based nature, this approach helps learners develop their communicative and interpersonal skills as it proposes life-like tasks in which students are prompted to use the

language to do things in the world. In this sense, I believe RPGs can impact student learning positively. During the project I described in this paper, it was possible to see learners working collaboratively to solve problems and to make complex decisions not only concerning the language itself, but also concerning the situations proposed in the role-play. The activities described here are low cost, which make them suitable even for contexts with limited resources. In addition to that, these activities are easy to adapt, which means that their use is not bound to only language classrooms: they may also be used to teach a variety of other subjects in an interdisciplinary way.

Despite the evident benefits of an approach that involves games, however, it is still seen by some (teachers and students' parents among these) with mistrust (Bowman, 2010; Ghazal & Singh, 2016). In order to try to change this perspective, it is important that studies that emphasize the benefits of such approach continue to be conducted and that teachers and educators continue to share their practices because, as Ghazal & Singh (2016) believe, "the future holds a bright prospect for innovative game-based learning practices".

It is important to highlight, however, that RPG based tasks are time-consuming and, in this sense, must be planned ahead and carefully in order to successfully engage and motivate learners, rather than generate frustration.

The narrow focus of this study was on the communicative nature of RPGs, leaving outside of its scope several other interesting features and applications that a role-playing based approach to the teaching of English as foreign language offer. However, these can be addressed in a future broader study.

REFERENCES

- Appel, Gabriela & Lantolf, James. 1994. Speaking as mediation: a study of L1 and L2 text recall. Tasks. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78(4), p. 437-452.
- Armstrong, Michael. 2016. *Role-playing Game Based Learning, EFL Curriculum*. Dissertação de Mestrado. St. Cloud State University.
- Azarola-Negueruela, Eduardo & García, Próspero. 2016. Sociocultural theory and the language classroom. In *The Routledge handbook of English language teaching* (p. 295-309). London: Routledge.
- Beichner, Robert. 2014. History and evolution of active learning spaces. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 137, p. 9-16.
- Bowman, Sarah. 2010. *The Functions of Role-Playing Games: how participants create community, solve problems and explore identity*. North Carolina: McFarland.
- Cook, Mike, Gremo, Matthew, & Morgan, Ryan. 2017. Playing around with literature: tabletop role-playing games in middle grades ELA. *Voices from the Middle*, 25(2), p. 62-69.
- East, Martin. 2012. *Task-based Language Teaching from the Teacher's Perspective: insights from New Zealand*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co.
- Freire, Paulo. 2005. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, Paulo. 1996. *Pedagogia da Autonomia: saberes necessários à prática educativa*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra.
- Gibbons, Pauline. 2015. *Scaffolding Language Scaffolding Learning: teaching second language learners in the midstream classroom*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Gibbons, Pauline. 2013. Scaffolding. In *The Routledge encyclopedia of second language acquisition* (p. 563-564). London: Routledge.

- Ghazal, Sadeqa & Singh Smriti. 2016. Game-based language learning: activities for ESL classes with limited access to technology. *ELT Voices*, 6(4), p. 1-8.
- Hall, Graham. 2016. Method, methods and methodology. In *The Routledge handbook of English language teaching* (p. 209-223). London: Routledge.
- Hua, Zhu & Kramersch, Claire 2016. Language and culture in ELT. In *The Routledge handbook of English language teaching* (p. 38-50). London: Routledge.
- Jackson, Steve. 1993. *GURPS Basic Set*. Austin: Steve Jackson Games.
- Jacobs, George & Renandya, Willy. 2016. Student-centred learning in ELT. In *English language teaching today: linking theory and practice* (p. 13-25). Switzerland: Springer.
- Kapp, Karl. 2012. *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.
- Kramersch, Claire. 2011. Language and culture. In *The Routledge handbook of applied linguistics* (p. 305-317). New York: Routledge.
- Lantolf, James & Thorne, Steven. 2006. Sociocultural theory and second language learning. In *Theories in second language acquisition* (p. 201-224). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Larsen-Freeman, Diane. 2011. Key concepts in language learning and language education. In *The Routledge handbook of applied linguistics* (p. 155-170). New York: Routledge.
- Li, Li & Walsh, Steve. 2016. Classroom talk, interaction and collaboration. In *The Routledge handbook of English language teaching* (p. 486-498). London: Routledge.
- Morán, José. 2015. Mudando a educação com metodologias ativas. In *Convergências midiáticas, educação e cidadania: aproximações jovens* (p. 15-33). Ponta Grossa: Mídias Contemporâneas.
- Ortega, Lourdes. 2011. Second language acquisition. In *The Routledge handbook of applied linguistics* (p. 171-184). New York: Routledge.
- Phillips, Brian. 1994. Role-Playing Games in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom. *Proceedings of the Tenth National Conference on English Teaching and Learning in the Republic of China* (p. 625-648). Taipei: Crane Publishing.
- Resnick, Mitchel. 2004. Edutainment? No thanks. I prefer playful learning. *Associazione Civita Report on Edutainment*.
- Sarmiento, Simone. 2004. Ensino de cultura na aula de língua estrangeira. *Revista Virtual de Estudos da Linguagem*, 2(2), p. 1-22.
- Tasker, Thomas & Thorne, Steven. 2011. Sociocultural and cultural-historical theories of language development. In *The Routledge handbook of applied linguistics* (p. 487-500). New York: Routledge.
- Teixeira, Anísio 2010. A pedagogia de Dewey. In *John Dewey* (p. 33-66). Pernambuco: Massangana.
- Thornbury, Scott. 2011. Language teaching methodology. In *The Routledge handbook of applied linguistics* (p. 185-199). New York: Routledge.
- Van den Branden, Kris 2016. Task-based language teaching. In *The Routledge handbook of English language teaching* (p. 238-251). London: Routledge.
- Zalka, Csenge. 2012. *Adventures in the Classroom: Creating Role-Playing Games Based on Traditional Stories for the High School Curriculum*. Dissertação de Mestrado. East Tennessee State University.