

# *Text Production as a Form of Expression and Collaboration: Reflections on a Writing Project in Initial Classes of German as an Additional Language*

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## **Abstract:**

This article aims to reflect on the results of a proposal for teaching German as an additional language (GAL) through written production projects. This proposal was developed with students from an initial course (German Language II) at Universidade de São Paulo in emergency education during the Covid-19 pandemic. The activities were carried out in three phases: (i) choice of theme and text production; (ii) reviewing the production of colleagues (pair revision); (iii) discussion of results together with the Professor and two monitors. The project results highlighted the importance of collaborative production activities with a critical bias to enable individual expression in GAL. The text production and pair revision process allowed a greater understanding of the students' needs, not only regarding language knowledge, but also a space for collaboration and support. The experience with written production projects emphasizes relevant issues within contextualized social practices, allowing a space for interaction and greater involvement in the individual process of learning GAL in a critical-reflective environment.

## **Keywords:**

Text production. German as an additional Language. Didactic projects as a form of reflection and collaboration.

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## INTRODUCTION

The diversity of transformations and challenges of today's society had – and will continue to have for many years to come – direct implications for the teaching and learning of additional languages (AL)<sup>1</sup>. Between 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on discussions in Applied Linguistics and on AL teaching, especially in its critical and interdisciplinary perspective. Such discussions sought to find relevant solutions for new ways of teaching and learning in synchronous and asynchronous environments. In addition to the issues of time and teaching tools (AQUINO; OLIVEIRA, 2021, forthcoming), the understanding of spaces and forms of interaction needed to be drastically rethought and adapted. Nevertheless, despite numerous challenges, the emergency teaching context enabled a change of perspective and didactic-pedagogical possibilities that can offer new ways of teaching-learning ALs in different contexts.

Applied Linguistics can be considered an interdisciplinary research area focused on solving problems involving language use (MOITA LOPES, 2006), and its critical perspective seeks a constant plurality and inclusion of dissonant voices. Thus, the critical bias of Applied Linguistics strives to provide a dynamic and reflective movement, which is essential for language teaching and learning, especially in academic contexts (AQUINO; FERREIRA, 2023). According to Freire (1997), for critical education, it is necessary to differentiate between systematic approaches, i.e., those imposed by unilateral power (from the curriculum, the institution, the teacher) and, inclusive ones, which must be carried out and organized together with the students, in order to include the different voices and perspectives in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, we consider that one of the main goals of AL teaching today is to create spaces for the development of a critical-reflective awareness so that students can increasingly appropriate and transform their individual learning process (AQUINO, 2020).

Nevertheless, we can observe in several teaching-learning contexts of German as an Additional Language (GAL) the use of imported teaching materials (mainly from large publishers in Germany) that disregard issues and approaches of local social relevance, which can negatively interfere with the interest and participation of students, as well as the teachers themselves. The lack of a sense of belonging and representation (ARANTES, 2018) in these materials indicates the importance of the debate on the elaboration of practical activities focused on local needs, especially in the context of teacher training, as is the case in Languages courses (Letras, Portuguese-German) (AQUINO; OLIVEIRA, in press). In this article, we consider that a truly active attitude in the individual learning process can only be achieved through a reflective and problematizing insertion of students in relation to their reality. Therefore, it is necessary to promote instruments and experiences that encourage such critical-reflexive action on pedagogical practices.

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<sup>1</sup> We chose to use the term additional language (AL) to the detriment of foreign language (FL), then, while the designation FL indicates that learning was developed outside a social interaction, AL refers to the language as a relevant resource for participation in social practices (AQUINO; SCHMIDT, FEITOSA, 2022). Thus, the term LA is associated with the use of a language as a means of integration into daily life.

In this article, we intend to present a proposal for a written production project carried out during the second semester of 2021 with students of the German Language II course at the University of São Paulo (FFLCH-USP). This course had around 35 students enrolled, however, the project was introduced as a non-compulsory activity with the gain of extra points for participation. In each of the three projects (beginning, middle, and end of the semester) between 10 and 15 students participated. The course had the support of two assistants, who helped organize the project activities, as well as review and discuss the written productions. In addition to providing practical support to the project, the assistants also kept in close contact with the students of the discipline through a WhatsApp group, which was essential for the elaboration of theme options for the projects, in the sense that the themes could instigate the active participation of the apprentices. The choice of topics was also relevant when it was time for peer evaluations and joint discussions since interactions reflect positive experiences not only on issues related to linguistic aspects but also on individual expression and mutual acceptance. Especially in the emergency teaching context during the pandemic, this collaborative environment proved to be of essential importance both for language learning and also for the health and mental integrity of students, teachers, and assistants.

The three written projects were carried out in three main phases: i) first, the students selected one of the proposed themes (two options for each project) and had two weeks to produce the texts and hand them in the Moodle platform; (ii) after handing in the initial text, the students anonymously (within a week) reviewed their colleagues' production (peer evaluation) and handed their considerations through a delivery system in Moodle; (iii) at the end of the peer evaluation, the assistants and the teacher made the final review of the production and peer evaluation and presented feedback on the activities in writing and with discussion meetings at the end of the classes. Because of the level of GAL knowledge, the texts did not need to be extensive, i.e., more than one page and the language use could be informal, since the focus of the tasks was that the students had the opportunity to position themselves about the themes proposed for each project while making it possible to use the knowledge of the language developed during regular classes.

Through different themes, such as writing the end of a story, presenting a personal report, writing a poem, or telling a fictional story (these themes will be developed in the third section). The perspectives focused on the interests and needs of the students, thus the proposed activities aimed to address facets of the world and social issues within different narratives, allowing the production and discussion of texts to open a space in which students could reflect on and position themselves using the target language. Therefore, from the precepts of a critical and transgressive applied linguistics, the tasks of the written production project take into account the learning of German with a social bias and focused on the needs and interests of teachers and students, since it understands the implication of teaching activities for the local context (MOITA LOPES, 2006).

Our proposal with this project is, therefore, to create a GAL teaching space through themes and reflections that are relevant to the sociocultural and learning reality of students in this course, making them feel represented and motivated to express themselves in German. The projects resulted in significant considerations on two levels, one of them related to linguistic issues regarding the learning of lexical and grammatical aspects of the language. The second level, which represents the main focus of this article, corresponds to the design of a welcoming space so that students could express themselves on various social and individual issues, such as family and relationships; life during the pandemic; emotional issues (loneliness, depression, and anxiety); and reflections on their GAL learning.

Bearing in mind the development of the peer evaluation phases (ii) and the collaborative discussion with assistants and teachers (iii), the proposal for the production of texts had a specific goal, that is, the exchange of experiences and opinions on various topics. Therefore, we consider that the project's activities establish a dialogical environment, since the textual productions were able to convey to the readers (colleagues, teacher, and assistants) the ideas and perspectives of the speaker, carrying, therefore, an authentic socio-historical context external only to the teaching environment (BAKHTIN, 2003). Consequently, the readers (colleagues, assistants, and the teacher) were able to dialogue with the authors, enabling an environment of interaction and collaboration. Therefore, we consider that this proposal achieved its initial goal of GAL teaching-learning, going

even further by enabling politically and socially relevant reflections focused on the intervention of linguistic problems and applicability in practical situations in the local context.

In the next section, a brief overview of the current context of research in Applied Linguistics will be presented, with emphasis on an interdisciplinary and critical perspective. Next, we present the principles and phases of elaboration and application of the written production project and, in the third section, some of the results obtained with the project will be described and analyzed. Finally, in the conclusion of this work, we present some final reflections, as well as future perspectives.

## **CRITICAL APPLIED LINGUISTICS**

Recent research in Applied Linguistics has shown a great effort to move away from the traditional assumptions of theoretical linguistics, seeking to achieve a more hybrid discipline, in which dialogue with other areas is essential (AQUINO; FERREIRA, 2023). With regards to additional languages, the social and psychological aspects of learning, that is, the knowledge and experience of those involved in teaching practices (teachers and learners) are essential for the process of critical-reflective training. Therefore, in order to deal with the complex factors involved in the conjuncture of critical teaching-learning of languages, we considered that an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, such as Applied Linguistics, may bring to light what cannot be contemplated in previous theoretical approaches (AQUINO, 2020).

The interdisciplinary or transgressive Applied Linguistics (PENNYCOOK, 2001) has been portrayed in many studies, because, when trying to envision intelligibility regarding social problems in which language plays a central role, such works have felt the urgency of relating their performance to an epistemology that converses with the current world (MOITA LOPES, 2006). Interdisciplinarity makes it possible to escape from pre-established and decontextualized views to bring a greater focus on problematizing language use issues closer to reality inside or outside the classroom (AQUINO; FERREIRA, 2023). In this sense, we consider that the interdisciplinary and transgressive theories of teaching and learning additional languages must be established taking into account the historical, political, and sociocultural issues of a given context as the main aspect because within this perspective of Applied Linguistics it would be unfeasible to describe a language in a stagnant way and out of its context of use (RAJAGOPALAN, 2006).

A transgressive approach is based on the assumption that it is essential to teach a language considering the effects and values it produces in a given society (URZÊDA-FREITAS, 2012). Therefore, language teaching needs to be nourished by reflections on the needs, experiences, and didactic practices focused on the student and his/hers learning context. According to Freire (1997, p. 93), knowledge is only built through a restless search, which expands power and ways of creating and acting and, consequently, in transgressive action and reflection of the world. However, in order to achieve a transgressive teaching, which provides a critical-reflective awareness and promotes a new perception of knowledge, it is not enough just to listen to the people involved in the learning process, but to challenge them more and more, problematizing their existential situation and their participation in society (FREIRE, 1997).

From this new interdisciplinary and transgressive perspective, emerged the current Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL), bringing with it the concern to enable greater plurality and inclusion of voices (PENNYCOOK, 2001). In the context of language teaching and learning, this approach provides an increasingly dynamic movement, in which researchers, teachers, and students need to be challenged to actively position themselves, producing relevant knowledge within a socio-historical perspective (FAGUNDES; AMADO, 2020). With regards to the core of our study, language as a critical practice aimed at the needs of a specific social-cultural context was reached through a project of production and discussion of texts in the German language that linked contexts and themes relevant to learners, with which by using the target language for interaction, allowed them to feel confident to express individual reflections and collaborate with their peers.

Thus, recognizing the growing need to help language learners, especially in an academic environment, to reflect on the existing power relations in the intercultural encounter provided in language teaching, as well

as to consider the various aspects involved in the individual learning process and beliefs involved in it, the written production project was organized with the aim of developing activities that value the knowledge and experiences of the students. In this project, we consider that the pedagogical practices must be based on the aspirations of teachers and apprentices, and focused on thematic axes and approaches that take into account the local context and its specific demands, which are linked to the construction of knowledge and significant experiences to learning the target language.

Therefore, with this work, we aim to present the activities of the written production project in German, which seeks to be politically and socially relevant in order to intervene in linguistic problems and have applicability in practical situations in the local context. The activities described below idealize an active engagement of students (the subject and the assistants) in their learning process, fostering a space for critical-reflective participation. In addition, the description of the elaboration and application of this project seeks to offer suggestions that support teachers with examples of concrete proposals to be adapted to language teaching. However, our purpose is not to prescribe a stagnant didactic progression or sequence, but to introduce a project work plan that is adaptable to different teaching-learning environments of GAL.

In the next section, we present a detailed description of the methodology, the central principles, and the different phases for the elaboration and application of the written production project in the German Language II class, referring to the A2 level (CONSELHO DA EUROPA, 2001), at the University of São Paulo<sup>2</sup>.

## THE WRITTEN PRODUCTION PROJECT

For this project, we intended to develop proposals for written production activities that, in addition to encouraging GAL learning, took into account students' lives and experiences during the pandemic, providing an environment for interaction and collaboration. The purpose of this project was, therefore, the planning of activities that would essentially meet the needs of German Language II students, so that the use and reflection on the target language would be as authentic as possible, i.e., allowing the learners the opportunity to interact and collaborate with classmates and teachers based on topics that spoke to their reality and interests (MOITA-LOPES, 2006). In this sense, the guideline of the tasks was not to produce linguistic units controlled by fixed structural phenomena (such as the position of words in the sentence or the repetition of previously learned words or structures), but rather to enable holistic communicative means (AQUINO, 2019) that consider the critical-reflective meaning of interaction in GAL (FREIRE, 1997) using language in an integrated manner in different situations and communicative contexts.

The pedagogical curriculum of the Languages course (Letras) at the University of São Paulo<sup>3</sup> seeks to explain what would be the main differences between the courses offered by the university and those of language institutes, emphasizing that the first one does not only aim at proficiency in the target language but a critical-reflexive analysis on the linguistic, literary and translation characteristics of the target language, as well as its theoretical and practical foundation. Thus, the university course offers additional language seminars that present the knowledge and experience necessary for the training of future professionals in the areas of research and translation or language teaching. However, this course, specifically in the German language, presents some substantial limitations, such as the insufficient workload for learning a language in which the students have no

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<sup>2</sup> The objective of the German language courses at USP is, initially, to train the student in the four language skills (reception, oral and written production) as basic assumptions for reflection on the foreign language and the development of their discursive-textual competence in different cultural contexts. This competence will allow the student to transit through the three areas of activity represented by linguistics, literature and translation (UNIVERSIDADE DE SÃO PAULO, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> The bachelor in Language with focus on the German language must be able to deal with texts in order to be able to act concretely in professional activities that have the text as a central object, such as: teaching language and literature at different levels, translation, literary criticism, language consultancy, research activities, etc. (UNIVERSIDADE DE SÃO PAULO, 2022).

prior knowledge; very crowded classes (50 enrollment spaces are offered for GAL classes); and a curriculum with little flexibility, providing few opportunities to work with diversified material (AQUINO; SCHMIDT; FEITOSA, 2022).

During synchronous meetings, the students mentioned the need for more opportunities for written tasks in German, with the possibility of individualized feedback. In addition to this direct request, the teacher and the assistants already noticed the importance of synchronous meetings to maintain interaction, whether in the study of the language itself or in social and interpersonal contact with classmates. A great indicator of this fact was the decrease in participation in asynchronous activities and greater interest during synchronous classes. Taking this into account, we decided to organize the project as a non-compulsory activity so that the students would have the opportunity to carry out textual productions and have individual feedback on their work. In all, about 15 students (42% of the class) participated in the project, which we consider an adequate number, considering the context of emergency teaching and the commitment required to participate in activities.

Considering the demands of a university language course, we understand the relevance of embracing aspects of the education of future teachers and researchers, therefore, we decided to include in the project, in addition to individual text production, the method of peer evaluation as a form of formative assessment, allowing greater autonomy and interaction of students in their learning process (HADJI, 2001). This approach allows a continuous reflection on individual learning and pedagogical practices since it requires comparative associations and solution pursuit to carry out interventions. Furthermore, the peer evaluation was very well received by the students and indicated promising results concerning language learning, interpersonal relationships, and as a form of initial teaching experiences in GAL.

The elaboration of these written production project activities were based on an adaptation by Aquino (2019) for the designs suggested by Krumm (1991):

1. Conceive concrete goals that allow language use in all its communicative capacity, experiencing new possibilities;
2. Teachers and learners act as co-authors in the planning and execution of tasks;
3. The target language should provide the components to carry out the tasks;
4. Inclusion of the outside world into the classroom, enabling concrete production experiences with the target language;
5. Encourage student autonomy, by using different tools such as dictionaries, grammar books, the internet, videos, apps, etc.;
6. Provide specific feedback in the form of text review and discussion;
7. The results should be presented – inside or outside the classroom.

Based on this design, the written production project was constituted of three main phases:

1. Students had to choose between two themes and in a period of two weeks, they produced textual inputs. To maintain anonymity, only the teacher and the assistants had access to the identity of the authors;
2. After handing in the initial text, the students had a week to carry out a peer review, which was done anonymously;
3. With the initial textual inputs and peer review, the assistants and the teacher prepared individual feedback, which were then discussed together at the end of the synchronous meetings.

At the beginning of the project, we presented the students with a list of themes and genres through Google Forms, in which the most selected alternatives were then used in the project. The options were based on three aspects: that the topics had a direct or indirect relation to the linguistic and communicative goals of

regular classes (AQUINO, 2020); that the genres (the ones chosen to be reported: poem and story) were diverse and could establish a concrete dialogical environment between interlocutors (BAKHTIN, 2003); that the themes and genres could encourage participation in contextualized communicative actions (MOITA LOPES, 2006), especially taking into account the pandemic context. In the end, two themes were selected for the students to choose from for each project (6 in all), expanding the opportunities for autonomy and intercultural discussions. Considering the prioritization of critical (FREIRE, 1997) and interdisciplinary perspectives for language teaching (PENNYCOOK, 2001), we consider it fundamental to enable a greater plurality and inclusion of voices to the project.

After choosing the themes, the students developed the texts, with complexity depending on their level of knowledge of the German language. The topics were quite diversified, such as the production of creative texts, text of opinion, and literary texts, as well as discussions on more individual topics, such as the GAL learning process, different family relationships, etc. Next, we present the three projects developed<sup>4</sup>:

- Project 1: (i) Write a sequel to Max and Lena’s story; (ii) Write a report about your daily life during the pandemic.
- Project 2: (i) Write a poem about “paths”; (ii) Describe a story about a major change in your life (a change of city, a personal event).
- Project 3: (i) Tell a story from your childhood; (ii) What does family mean to you?

The following table presents a summary of themes and the linguistic and communicative goals of the written production activities.

**Table 1** - Themes and goals of the projects.

Project	Theme	Linguistic goals	Communicative goals
1	(i) Write a sequel to Max and Lena’s story; (ii) Write a report about your daily life during the pandemic.	Present and Past tense. Imperative. Modal Particles: doch, ja, mal.	Create possible endings to a known story. Report on experiences, feelings, and routines during the pandemic.
2	(i) Write a poem about “paths”; (ii) Describe a story about a major change in your life (a change of city, a personal event).	Giving direction using prepositions with accusative and dative. Personal and indefinite pronoun.	Write a poem within the theme “paths”. Write a report about a major personal change (physical and/or emotional).
3	(i) Tell a story from your childhood; (ii) What does family mean to you?	Subordinate clauses with “als”, “wenn”. Possessive article.	Talk about a childhood story or event. Discuss individual perceptions and experiences within the family theme.

**Source:** own authorship.

<sup>4</sup> Projekt 1: (i) Fortsetzung der Geschichte von Max und Lena; (ii) Berichte über deinen Alltag in der Pandemie. Projekt 2: (i) Ein Gedicht zum Thema “Weg”; (ii) Beschreibe die Erfahrung einer großen Veränderung in deinem Leben (eine Umzug oder persönliche Veränderung, u.s.w.). Projekt 3: (i) Erzählen Sie eine Geschichte aus Ihrer Kindheit; (ii) Was bedeutet Familie für dich?

As it is shown in the previous table (Table 1), the linguistic goals suggested for the first project refer to the use of the present and past tense, as well as the imperative and some modal particles. In this article, the linguistic topics refer to contents that were worked on in the classroom that allowed the elaboration of communicative goals. In the second project, which took place in the middle of the semester, the students could explore content related to direction and paths (*Weg*) with the use of prepositions in the accusative and dative case, as well as the use of personal and indefinite pronouns. The choice of themes made it possible to develop a poem with flexible issues (paths in life, literal and physical, or personal changes). In the last topic, which took place at the end of the semester, the students could use subordinate sentences and possessive articles to tell a story from their childhood or write a text about family.

In the next section, some of the experiences resulting from carrying out the academic writing project with the German Language II class at the University of São Paulo will be discussed in greater detail.

## RESULTS

The project brought out themes and approaches that dialogue with social and language teaching-learning practices that encompass issues that go far beyond the classroom environment, seeking inspiration from the students' needs and interests both through involvement in the selection of themes and genres, as well as through peer review and joint discussion about the process and results. As previously mentioned, the proposed themes were selected considering the specific local characteristics of our group of students, such as the sequel of a story, the creation of a poem, individual reports about daily life during the pandemic, family, and other personal events. The rough idea of the project was presented by the students themselves, making them co-authors in their learning process as they had a clear intention for their individual expectations (AQUINO, 2020; MOITA LOPES, 2006).

The project proposes a constant exchange of ideas and knowledge, including reflections, perceptions, and a welcoming and safe environment for the active participation of all students. Considering the theoretical basis of Critical Applied Linguistics, we listed issues that were relevant to the learning experience of that group, i.e., with aspects that relate to the content learned in the regular meetings, with a variety of genres and themes that allowed a closer relationship with the students' reality and needs. To make this possible, the students selected which topics most interested them and agreed to carry out the assessments in pairs, contributing not only to their language learning and academic education but also to the collaboration with their classmates. In this sense, with this written production project, we sought to go beyond the purely structural sphere of the language, including the project's participants in the elaboration of activities and in discursive interactions, so that they could take positions, develop perceptions and establish relationships through the texts in German and the discussions (AQUINO, FERREIRA, 2023; FREIRE, 1997).

As previously described, in the second phase of the project, the students received the productions of their colleagues anonymously and carried out peer evaluations on the German language when and how they considered it necessary. After delivering their revision, the monitors, with the help of the teacher, developed the final revision, offering feedback not only on the related linguistic issues but also on the chosen revision strategies (forms, practical and pedagogical tools for revising texts in LA). At the end of the feedback period, the students had the opportunity to rewrite or revise their texts.

The peer review strategy was very well received and evaluated by the students, who were able to experience a more engaged participation in their learning process (AQUINO, 2020). In discussions about the project during the semester (text review and feedback with the teacher and assistants), the participants indicated that the peer review task enabled a better understanding of their colleagues' difficulties in GAL, as well as an acceptance of their own limitations, which was relevant to the development of problem solution strategies. Therefore, we believe that peer review can support the process of self-regulation of learning (HADJI, 2002), as well as provide opportunities for critical reflection on the possibilities of collaborative work.

In the text review and feedback meetings, the students also described that reading the productions of others opened an important space for involvement and empathy for their classmates (especially the texts about family and daily life in the pandemic), which, in the same way as with the linguistic issues, made them reflect on the different perceptions of sociocultural reality through the lives and stories portrayed. In one of the productions about everyday life during the pandemic, a student reported that he had broken up with his girlfriend and was feeling very alone and having suicidal thoughts. The peer who did the evaluation alerted us immediately, which allowed the professor to contact the student to offer assistance and information about the university's psychological care. This report of loneliness and sadness was very recurrent, which made the teacher increase the frequency and duration of collaborative activities during synchronous classes. This change in the organization of classes had a direct positive result in a more active and confident participation of the learners, which demonstrates the students' ability to solve problems not only at the didactic/linguistic level but also in welcoming and collaborating with their classmates.

The topic of family in the third project was quite relevant, being an activity in which the learners were able to get involved and express themselves in German about different situations and emotions, which provided many reflections and acceptance in joint discussions. The discussions are primarily based on the different family constellations and different ways of living in community, such as the ones who still lived with their parents, or those who shared an apartment in a dormitory, or even those who were married and/or had children. Secondly, the difficulty of finding vocabulary and expressions to describe personal feelings and perceptions on such a complex topic was also discussed, but the students indicated that the project allowed reflection and linguistic-communicative learning so that the tasks of production and evaluation were carried out properly. Nevertheless, many students chose more neutral issues and approaches for their productions and evaluation, which allowed a greater focus on structural and linguistic discussions. In this sense, we see the importance of providing opportunities for projects with flexible discussion topics, which allow for both a work focused on lexicogrammatical issues, as well as an individual and personal position on more intimate and profound themes.

With the results obtained in the development of this project, it was possible to observe that the writing activities (production and peer review) were very relevant for all involved, as they allowed overcoming the outdated boundaries of learning an AL, also showing the power of choice, discernment, and positioning of students and assistants (and also learners). At the end of the project, the students reported that they managed to achieve their initial goals to produce texts in German within different themes and genres, and that participating in the peer review and feedback discussion allowed the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the ways and possibilities of using the target language, in addition to providing opportunities for experimentation with new vocabularies and expressions beyond regular classes. In the end, the students reported feeling more confident about their language knowledge, wanting more active participation in classes, to be able to approach and collaborate with their colleagues in other contexts, such as creating study groups and exchanging messages through WhatsApp and Facebook, which was very important during the social distancing during the pandemic.

We believe, therefore, that inclusive approaches such as those in this project can encourage students to take ownership of learning the target language more autonomously and reflectively. However, in these approaches, the learning process needs to go hand in hand with a more complex and critical teaching undertaking (PENNYCOOK, 2006). Finally, we emphasize that for the teaching of critical-reflective AL, being proficient in the learned language means thinking critically through it, being, therefore, aware of the effects that your utterances can produce individually and on your peers (AQUINO, 2020).

## CONCLUSIONS

The main goal of this article was to present and describe proposals for activities developed within the scope of a written production project in a German Language II class at the University of São Paulo. To this end, we presented at the beginning of the article a brief discussion about our alignment with theories and practices

of Applied Linguistics with a critical and interdisciplinary bias (MOITA LOPES, 2006; PENNYCOOK, 2001). In a second moment, we introduced a description of the principles that guided the elaboration of the project, as well as the characteristics of its application. Regarding the academic context of GAL teaching, with a focus on the training of future teachers and researchers, we highlighted the importance of thinking about this as a space for critical reflection on different cultural, political, and social themes, with the aim of re-signifying them (AQUINO; FERREIRA, 2023). Therefore, this GAL teaching environment had a fundamental impact so that it was possible to prioritize a perspective that questioned traditional models and reflected on language learning approaches within a more flexible progression.

Regarding the core of our proposal, we conclude that written production in GAL can be seen as a critical practice due to the concern to take into account the needs and interests of students in a specific social-cultural and historical context. In addition to delimiting production themes, with which the learners could feel confident to express individual reflections, the project allowed discussion on linguistic aspects. Thus, we are inclined to say that the simple response to commands from a highly didactic textbook such as replying to an email, writing a postcard, fill in the gaps in a grammar exercise, proves to be devoid of meaning if it cannot incite deeper reflections and an individual positioning (AQUINO; FERREIRA, 2023). According to the analysis of the activities and group discussions, the project provided a unique space to reflect on the diversity of issues that overcome language barriers. The discussion of texts by students of different family and socioeconomic backgrounds, with different language skills and personalities, provided a more comprehensive and empathetic view of their classmates, bringing them even closer, which ended up reflecting positively on the classroom environment beyond the project.

The activities of the written production project in German sought to be politically and socially relevant with a view to intervening in linguistic and learning problems but furthermore having applicability of the use of the target language in situations that could engage students to share their experiences, feelings, and creativity. In this sense, we would like to conclude this discussion by emphasizing the importance of themes and proposals for projects like this one, especially those focused on the university context. We increasingly notice the need for discussions and concrete proposals that allow teachers and students to assume their roles as protagonists in the teaching-learning of additional languages, which, in our view, can only be achieved through an emphasis on local needs and interests.

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