

«*Language is a functional means of communication and not a school exercise*»

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THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SAÍDOS DA CASCA'S CURRICULUM

Using a methodology that has already been applied in some countries of the European Union in the field of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), we intend to encourage the early introduction of English language skills.

This methodology embraces the discovery of a second language, by associating it with the acquisition of new competences, with the development of certain subject matters and with themes that embrace all the different curriculum areas.

WHY A BILINGUAL EDUCATION?

We have all heard the expression “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks”. Although it does not portray a nice message, the truth is that the apparently magic capacity that children have to easily learn the phonological and grammatical rules of a language is well documented. Furthermore, this biological advantage that children have hits its peak before they complete three years of age, starting to lose ground after the lateralization period (between six and eight years of age).

As for *cognitive factors*, an adult is naturally induced to interpreting and producing phonemes according to the phonology of his own language, unlike children, that don’t possess such an acute auditory sensibility, which makes the learning of a second language more natural.

Lastly, the psycho-affective factors reflect yet another explanation of aging negatively influencing the learning of a second language: “*The joyful spontaneity is replaced by an obsession with the social image we give [...] by the fear of making mistakes*” (Hagège, 1997).

Recent studies show results that point towards the learning of a foreign language in a pre-school age as potentiating gains at a linguistic level (even relative to the mother tongue), at a creativity level, towards discovering themselves and others, and also, in raising awareness towards cultural differences.

The environment acts in direct contact with the child, with verbal interaction being essential in the acquisition of the language. From this perspective, the child cannot acquire a language without growing immersed in an environment where these linguistic exchanges occur. This theory is as valid when learning their mother tongue as towards learning a second language.

OUR OBJECTIVE

Primarily, we intend that our children's first contact with the English language occurs in the most natural, enjoyable and stimulating manner as possible, instilling, in each one of them, a positive attitude towards the learning process.

We do not intend to anticipate the work that will be done later, namely, with the children's entry in primary school, nor teach the same concept and train the same competences. Our role is to take advantage of the enormous potential that we have found in infancy and, essentially, create the foundations so that every child feels comfortable as possible in this learning process, whilst at the same time we arouse their natural curiosity and give them the confidence to pursue it naturally.

Specifically, our objectives are: (a) promote familiarity with the English language; (b) encourage the naturalness and spontaneity in oral expression; (c) intuit the intonation and the different phonology of the English language; (d) present names of objects and concrete actions, that are part of the children's daily life; (e) promote the integration of students of a foreign origin; and (f) provide cultural experiences related to both countries.

This is the expected implementation of the bilingual education program in the Saídos da Casca's curriculum, in a gradual and progressive manner, increasing the exposure of the English language to children as they grow up and, consequently, as they acquire more competences related to content apprehension and active participation during the specific moments designed for that. In addition to these moments, and according to the methodologies of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), we intend that the English language also be used as a form of developing and enriching certain syllabus transversal to the various curricular components.

HOW DO WE TAKE THIS STEP?

Children are capable of understanding *what* we tell them long before they understand the meaning of the individual words. They also process the intonation, the gestures, the expressions as well as their organizational patterns. It is through this processing and comprehension of the messages that the child begins to learn their own (or any other) language.

Let's think about the activity that the children adopt most naturally: playing. Earlier they learn, for example, to master a ball, playing, on their own or with someone; progressively, they gain more confidence in their capacities towards that activity, but only much later will they be able to understand the rules of a game of football.

The learning of the English language occurs in the same way.

As with learning their mother tongue, in an intuitive and natural manner, this work should foster the development of active listening skills, the children's oral comprehension and expression, using dramatic and musical expression as basic instruments to achieve this.

The children will have moments directed towards the acquisition of this second language in the presence of the English teacher, who will join the group at specific moments in each and every room, distributed as follows: Nurseries and Gait Acquisition Rooms – 30 minutes, once a week; rooms for the 1/2 and 2/3 years old – 30 minutes, twice a week; 3 and 4 year old rooms – 45 minutes, 3 times per week; and the 4/5 year old room – approximately 1 hour per day.

In these English immersion moments, children will mostly be involved in songs, games, rhymes and stories told and sung in that language. With older children, some other themes will also be addressed, related to the introduction to the British culture, so they can better understand “what is English?”, “who talks like this?” and “where do they come from?”.

In addition to these moments, the Kindergarten (age 4/5) also has a bilingual Educator that, being in constant communication with the English teacher, will have the instruments that will allow her to enrich this learning experience. With this, English will be present not only in the formal time dedicated to it, but also in the promotion of other subjects that integrate the curriculum, with the introduction, for example, of a simple song or rhyme in English following the theme that was worked. Not only will this promote the children’s natural curiosity, but also the oral interaction, fundamental in the Kindergarten, related to the comprehension and mastering of the vocabulary, conversational fluency and pronunciation.

In every room, we will look to create a climate where children feel the need, curiosity and interest to communicate in English, through these activities conducted in small groups and in an involving and interactive manner. The ludic context is the foundation to these learning experiences.

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