How does Task Based Learning foster the development of speaking skills in the Young Learner classroom?

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Dedication

To my beloved parents and grandma who have always made me believe that dreams are possible to achieve with effort, persistence and joy.
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I would also like to thank all my students, especially my first class, the 3rd year of 2012-2013, from a public school in Alfama, Lisbon for having made me fall in love with a profession that I know now is my true calling. I will never forget them.
HOW DOES TASK BASED LEARNING FOSTER THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPEAKING SKILLS IN THE YOUNG LEARNER CLASSROOM?

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS: Task Based Learning, speaking skills, young learner, speaking tasks, oral interaction, oral production.

The present research is relevant at a time when English has become part of the curriculum in 3rd and 4th grades in the first cycle of Portuguese primary school. The main aim was to understand and implement task based learning in order to verify its benefits to the development of speaking skills. The research project was developed in a state primary school during the first term and involved a group of 25 learners attending the fourth grade. Classroom strategies and five speaking tasks in pairs and in groups were implemented in order to develop speaking skills. The data was collected from a reflection journal, audio recordings and a questionnaire to learners. The audio recordings were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively to check oral interaction and oral production of students while they were carrying out the speaking tasks. Results concluded that task based learning methodology can be incorporated in a topic based approach in order to develop speaking skills. However, especially for less experienced teachers, it is vital to create the conditions by using classroom strategies (e.g. routines, classroom language) for the successful implementation of task based learning. The teacher should be able to adapt the course book and produce tasks that fulfill learners’ needs and improve speaking skills. Results suggested that task based learning fostered the development of speaking skills with this specific group of students. The main conclusion of this study is that the teacher should consider, when creating speaking tasks for YLs, the following criteria: level of freedom of the task, the role of pretending in a child’s world, the fun nature of the task and the adequate level of challenge to engage learners and meet their proficiency levels. Thus speaking tasks can develop YLs’ communicative competence.
DE QUE FORMA O MÉTODO DE APRENDIZAGEM POR TAREFAS POTENCIA O DESENVOLVIMENTO DAS COMPETÊNCIAS DA ORALIDADE NO PRIMEIRO CICLO?

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RESUMO

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Método de aprendizagem por tarefas, competências da oralidade, aluno do 1º ciclo, tarefas de oralidade, interação oral, produção oral.

A presente pesquisa torna-se relevante numa altura em que o Inglês se tornou parte do currículo no primeiro ciclo do ensino básico português no 3º e 4º ano. O principal objetivo desta pesquisa foi perceber e implementar o método de aprendizagem por tarefas com vista à verificação dos seus benefícios para o desenvolvimento das competências da oralidade. O projeto de pesquisa foi desenvolvido numa escola primária pública durante o primeiro período e envolveu um grupo de 25 alunos do quarto ano de escolaridade. Foram implementadas estratégias de sala de aula e cinco tarefas de oralidade, feitas a pares ou em grupos, com o objetivo de desenvolver as competências da oralidade dos alunos. Os dados foram recolhidos através de um diário reflexivo, de gravações áudio e de um questionário final feito aos alunos. As gravações áudio foram analisadas qualitativamente e quantitativamente para verificar as interações e produções orais dos alunos enquanto estes desempenhavam as tarefas da oralidade. Os resultados concluíram que o método de aprendizagem por tarefas pode ser incorporado numa abordagem baseada em tópicos com vista a desenvolver as competências da oralidade. Contudo, especialmente para professores com pouca experiência, é vital que se criem as condições, através de estratégias de sala de aula (como por exemplo rotinas e linguagem de sala de aula), para o sucesso na implementação do método de aprendizagem por tarefas. O professor deve ser capaz de adaptar o manual e produzir tarefas que preencham as necessidades dos alunos e que melhorem as competências da oralidade. Os resultados sugeriram que o método de aprendizagem por tarefas fomentou o desenvolvimento das competências da oralidade com este grupo específico de alunos. A principal conclusão deste estudo é que o professor deve considerar, quando produzir tarefas de oralidade para os alunos do 1º ciclo, os seguintes critérios: nível de liberdade da tarefa, o papel do faz-de-conta no mundo da criança, a natureza divertida da tarefa e o adequado nível de desafio para envolver ativamente os alunos e atender ao seu nível de proficiência. Desta forma as tarefas da oralidade podem desenvolver a competência comunicativa dos alunos do 1º ciclo.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

L1  First Language
L2  Second Language
TBL  Task Based Learning
YL  Young Learner
Introduction

Since I started teaching six years ago I wondered how I could teach my students to speak English. I noticed that children love to talk, they like to express their ideas and emotions and it is through language that they build their perception of the world. The understanding of what surrounds us and of ourselves is created through interaction with the other.

Prior to the master's degree, my own experience as a student and in many conversations with first cycle colleagues, made me realize that working in pairs or groups is vital. However, my difficulty lay in how to make my students speak English. As much as I insisted on drilling the truth is that my students ended up communicating in Portuguese whenever they interacted in pairs or in groups and even when they asked me questions. In the master’s degree I learned to implement classroom strategies that reduced the use of Portuguese. Only when I was able to implement task based learning (TBL) I realized that young learners (YLs) were able to use English to communicate, to complete tasks, and to interact orally.

According to Willis (1996, p.23) “tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome.” TBL is a methodology focused on a learner-centered approach and it is based on the principles of communicative language teaching (Willis, 1996). The task is the core unit of TBL. Different topics can lead to different tasks. However, the main issue is the teacher’s ability to select tasks that engage YLs and improve their communicative skills. Tasks provide opportunities for learners “to listen to and participate in meaning-focused interactions from the very beginning, helping them to acquire the new language more naturally” (Willis, 1996, p.118).

I believe that due to my little experience as a teacher, in addition to the way I was taught English in the early years, I did not think it was possible for 8-9 year olds to be able to use English exclusively to complete tasks. Furthermore, I think my own experience is paradigmatic of English teaching in the 1st cycle in Portugal; lessons are still very teacher focused, rather than student-centered. Thus many traditional views of teaching still remain in Portuguese primary schools. Willis (1996, p.118) points out that “many teachers feel that real beginners need to be taught some grammar before
they can start to do tasks. But is this really the case? In task-based learning, students learn by doing; the learning is part of the task itself”.

Speaking skills should be given equal importance to other skills, such as listening, reading and writing. It is through developing the speaking skill that learners are able to learn the language and learn how to communicate in the classroom (Lawtie, 2004). So how can students learn to speak English if they are not given opportunities to communicate in English? Speaking is not repeating, but interacting with others while constructing discourse. Many course books offer plenty of speaking activities. However, they do not provide opportunities for real communication. Instead, they provide mechanical activities which are not engaging for YLs.

The main purpose of this research project was to improve YLs’ speaking skills. In order to understand how TBL fostered the development of speaking skills in the young learner classroom I formulated two research questions:

. How can the teacher adapt the course book to produce tasks that develop speaking skills?

. How do tasks develop oral interaction and oral production?

In order to answer these research questions the literature related to the topic was reviewed and action research was developed to collect data. Chapter I reviews the literature that lays the foundation for this research project. Chapter II introduces the action research project and it is divided in four sections. Section 1 refers to the context of the study, section 2 describes the research methodology applied, section 3 analyses the data collected and interprets results, and lastly section 4 presents the conclusions and considers the implications of these findings.
Chapter I. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review of this research project aims to provide a theoretical context of TBL in the first section, framing it in the paradigm of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The second section contemplates the adaptation of course books. The third section considers the importance of learning in interaction. The fourth section focuses on the advantages of TBL in learning a second or foreign language (L2) in the Young Learner (YL) classroom. Lastly, the fifth section considers its possible limitations.

I.1 Task Based Learning

I.1.1 Theoretical context of TBL

Unlike the more traditional teaching methods, TBL is part of the Communicative Language Teaching approach, which emerged and became popular after the 1970s. The objective of this approach is to develop communicative competence, defined by Hymes (1972) as an inherent grammatical competence but also as the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations, thus bringing the sociolinguistic perspective into the CLT approach.

Communicative competence is more likely to be achieved through meaningful oral tasks because they provide opportunities for the learner to participate in real communication. The primary goal of it is to enable students to use the language to communicate. The focus on meaning is at the core of TBL. Unlike the more traditional methods that teach language as a way to acquire its structural system, TBL underlines the importance of using meaningful communication in the process of learning a language (Willis & Willis, 2001). The more traditional methods of teaching an L2 are criticized as being unnatural and reducing (Long & Crookes, 1992) and explicitly teach grammar rules rather than promoting competence to use language (Prabhu, 1987).

In TBL language is seen as a means to achieve communication (Nunan, 2004). According to Ellis (2003) using language to carry out meaningful tasks promotes learning and the language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process. According to Willis (1996) the TBL framework is divided into three phases: pre-task, task cycle and post-task. However, Willis (1996) points out that the TBL framework has to be adapted for YLs, who need more exposure (a longer pre-task
phase and a shorter task cycle) and the task cycle “may well consist of sets of short
tasks rather than one long one (...) the planning or report stages are either omitted or
very short (...)” and “there is unlikely to be any language focus (Willis, 1996, p.119).

I.1.2 Adapting and supplementing the course book

Most course books nowadays are based on the PPP model (Richards, 2006) offering several speaking activities that are based on repetition. These types of activities are positive to improve pronunciation, fluency and automaticity of the language, but they are not enough to improve oral interaction and oral production. Therefore, they are insufficient to develop learner’s communicative competence. Leslie (2015, p.10) points out that “most course books today, although claiming to be communicative in nature, are based on firstly acquiring the structural system of the language, then learning how to use this system to communicate”, which is described as a ‘weak’ version of CLT by Howatt (1984):

The ‘weak’ version, which has become more or less standard practice in the last ten years, stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and, characteristically, attempts to integrate such activities into a wider programme of language teaching.... The ‘strong’ version of communicative teaching, on the other hand, advances the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but of stimulating the development of the language system itself. If the former (‘weak version’) could be described as ‘learning to use’ English, the latter (‘strong version’) entails ‘using English to learn it’ (p.279).

Teaching the ‘weak’ version of CLT has traditionally used the present-practice-produce (PPP) methodological model. This methodology suggests that it is possible to learn the language structures sequentially. However, this view of language learning is not supported by Second Language Acquisition research (Skehan, 1996).

Moreover, course books are “designed for a general audience and it may be that our textbooks do not fully meet our pupils’ specific needs” (Moon, 2000, p.86). In order to overcome these weaknesses, the teacher should be able to decide how to adapt the course book to their specific group of students (Graves, 2003).
It is suggested that for teachers with insufficient experience the best is “to start by trying out activities from textbooks and then later adapting them in small ways” (Moon, 2000, p.88). Then the teacher would be able to “select, adapt, reject and supplement” (Graves, 2003) the course book depending on learners’ age, interests and proficiency levels. Course books are tools for learning. Thus they are not inflexible.

In case the teacher wants to develop a specific skill and if the textbook does not provide activities that meet this need, it is advisable to supplement it by designing and implementing tasks that will improve that skill. Moon (2000) points out that “if we want to create our own activities, it is helpful first to have a way of analyzing them. This enables us to consider how and why they are constructed in the way they are” (2000, p.88). The author considers the following criteria when analyzing an activity: “goal (what the teacher wants to achieve through the activity), input (the material children will work on, e.g. oral instructions), the procedures (what children do with the input, e.g. speak), outcome (the result of the activity), teacher roles (e.g. communicative game will require the teacher to set up the task and then step back and monitor) and learner roles (the roles that the activity will require learners to perform)” (Moon, 2000, p.89).

Analyzing activities taken from the course book or created by the teacher, is thus a way of adapting teaching material to suit the teacher’s purposes and learners needs (Moon, 2000).

I.1.3 Learning in Interaction

Humans use language to communicate, to express ideas, opinions and feelings. Communication presupposes that there is an originator of the message and one (or more) receivers. Therefore, communication is established through interaction. All elements of communicative and interactive competence (grammar, discourse, sociolinguistics, pragmatic) are involved in human interaction. They must work together for successful communication to take place (Gutiérrez, 2005). A classroom is a social ‘work in construction’ in which teachers and students and student to student interact orally in order to get ‘things’ done. Thus, they are creating a living and unique organism with
their social and cultural interactions. If using language is a tool to mediation, interactions in L2 are more likely to promote opportunities for learning to take place.

Based on the argument supported by the socio-cultural theory, which defends that learning depends on social interaction, and that the learner understands how to do things through collaborative talk (Vygotsky 1987, cited by Mitchell & Myles, 2004), language is seen as a tool to mediation, therefore YLs benefit from speaking tasks in which they interact with peers in pairs or small groups. The teacher should be a facilitator for learning in the task cycle, clarifying any questions that may arise. The groups of learners can adopt different but complementary roles to achieve the task through interaction (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003).

Second Language Acquisition research suggests that second languages are acquired when the language learner processes language input in interactional situations and tasks. In other words, it is through interaction that the learner’s interlanguage system gradually develops.

Moreover, it is important to create a positive environment to encourage YLs’ interaction (Willis, 1996). As such, they can feel confident to speak and express themselves without feeling afraid of making mistakes. Willis (1996) states that creating a low stress atmosphere and using the language for real purposes are ways to get meaningful communication and through interaction learners have the chance to acquire discourse skills.

I.1.4 Advantages of TBL in the Young Learner classroom

One of the great advantages of TBL is that it is focused on a learner-centered approach (Willis, 1996), in opposition to the teacher-centered PPP model. By its nature, TBL provides the three essential conditions for learning to take place: exposure, use and motivation (Willis, 1996). The author points out that “these are basic enough to apply to all learners, regardless of their individual cognitive styles” (Willis, 1996, p.11).

Nunan (2004) emphasises that TBL allows learners to develop a set of discourse strategies such as opening and closing a conversation, asking and answering about personal information, etc. Also learners have the opportunity to interact in
different situations, in different pairs and groups. According to Willis (1996) there are a set of advantages of tasks carried out in pairs or groups such as the increase of learner’s confidence “without fear of being wrong or being corrected in front of the class”, and “it gives learners experience of spontaneous interaction (...) a chance to benefit from noticing how others express similar meanings (...) to practice negotiating turns to speak (...) using language purposefully and co-operatively (...) to participate in a complete interaction (...)” (1996, p.35). The author points out that “discourse skills such as these can only be acquired through interaction” (Willis, 1996, p.35).

Tasks are motivating to YLs because they have a goal to be achieved, through individual and collective efforts. When YLs successfully complete the tasks their motivation and confidence increases. Motivation is closely related to engagement which is a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive, behavioral, social and emotional dimensions (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). YLs love to speak, enjoy playing games and pretending to be adults. Both pretend play and language involve the same underlying ability to represent things symbolically (Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002). Children pretend about imaginary themes (things which do not really exist or that the child hasn’t experienced yet in real life), with others, each taking on different roles during the play. Language often drives the play. YLs explain their roles and use language to act out their role (Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002). Thus, TBL is motivating for YLs because they can use the L2 to carry out the tasks while they are playing or pretending in interaction with peers and, without perceiving, simultaneously, learners are acquiring the L2.

According to Cameron (2001) speaking skills are more than a simple aspect of learning a language in the YL classroom. Instead, speaking acts as the first source and site of language learning. The language is widely introduced orally, perceived orally, practiced and automatized orally. Therefore, classroom tasks are seen as the ‘environment’ or ‘ecosystem’ (van Geertz, 1998) in which the growth of skills in L2 takes place. Pinter (2006) points out that in order to develop speaking skills a great deal of time is spent practicing and repeating drilling exercises. However, in spite of being a positive aspect, repeating is not enough to improve YLs’ communicative competence.
I.1.5 Possible limitations of TBL with YLs

Carless (2002) points out that some practical difficulties exist in TBL. The author reports results of a study of TBL in elementary classrooms in Hong Kong that claims that TBL led to widespread use of L1, little L2 production and discipline challenges for teachers. However, he suggests that this could have arisen due to the cultural context in which it was implemented. The proficiency level of learners and the preparation of teachers are two important aspects that should be carefully addressed before implementing TBL and designing tasks (Carless, 2002).

TBL has been criticized by teachers and researchers. Their main claim is that TBL does not provide opportunities to focus on form. Seedhouse (1999) argues that TBL produces only one type of restricted communication. However, with YLs the focus on form is not the most important issue; the task difficulty prevails. Although the difficulty of a task can be estimated from the performance of learners, the factors that actually contribute to task difficulty are: “The cognitive load and clarity of the goal of the task” (Candlin, 1987 cited in Tavakoli, 2009). Learners in a study carried out by Nunan & Keobke (1995) pointed out that lack of familiarity with task types and confusion over the purpose of the task are the predominant factors that cause task difficulty. A class consists of learners with different talents, learning styles and motivation levels. Therefore, the tasks prescribed may be relevant for a few learners and for others it may be too difficult and for some others it may be too easy and they may feel that it is a waste of time to perform the task (Skehan, 2003). Involving all the learners in a task becomes problematic in a heterogeneous class (Littlewood, 2004).

The next chapter will introduce the action research project and it is divided in four sections. Section 1 refers to the context of the study, section 2 describes the research methodology applied, section 3 analyses the data collected and interprets results and lastly section 4 presents the conclusions and considers the implications of these findings.
Chapter II. THE ACTION RESEARCH

II.1 Context

My practicum took place at a public school near Lisbon. This school has classes from pre-primary to fourth grades. It has approximately 200 students and 12 mainstream teachers. The environment is friendly, teachers are helpful and there are no major behaviour problems among students.

The group involved in the study was a 4\textsuperscript{th} year class. It consisted of 26 students: 12 girls and 14 boys. Of these, three were children with special educational needs and had serious difficulties keeping up with learning English (especially writing). One of the students was bilingual (English – Portuguese). Ages ranged from 8 to 10. Their English was at A1 CEFR level (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, by the Council of Europe). Students enjoyed English classes as they were motivated to learn English. They were very participative and they were pleased to take part in the research. The course book adopted was SeeSaw 4 (Albuquerque & Marques, 2016), which was appealing to YLs and the majority were able to complete the different exercises from the two thematic units taught. Students’ behaviour improved along the term as the classroom rules were internalized and the relationship with the teacher strengthened.

The class was homogeneous in terms of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. However, it was a mixed ability class, and though the overall level was good, there were large asymmetries between learners with greater abilities and those not so able. Lessons lasted 60 minutes, twice a week.

According to ‘Metas’ State Curriculum for the 1\textsuperscript{st} cycle (Bravo, Cravo & Duarte, 2015) regarding oral interaction for 4th graders, learners should be able to “express appropriately in simple contexts” and “interact with the teacher and / or colleagues in simple and previously prepared situations”. Regarding oral production, learners should be able to “produce sounds, intonations and rhythms of the language” and “express yourself, with limited vocabulary, in previously prepared situations”. The overall pedagogical approach in the classroom was a communicative approach. In order to meet the objectives of speaking skills indicated by ‘Metas’ State Curriculum for the 1\textsuperscript{st} cycle (Bravo, Cravo & Duarte, 2015) I introduced TBL to supplement the
topic-based approach. The course book was organized around topics/thematic units and grammatical structures.

II. 2 Methodology

The methodology used to collect data for this research was action research. As Burns (2010: 12) points out: “Action research (AR) can be a very valuable way to extend our teaching skills and gain more understanding of ourselves as teachers, our classrooms and our students”. Thus, “AR involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring teaching contexts.” (2010: 2)

In my practicum, I invented and implemented tasks to supplement the course book which was organized around thematic units and grammatical structures.

II.2.1 Data Collection tools

II.2.1.1 Collecting consent

Asking consent is the first step of an ethical research. Permission was asked from school (Appendix A), parents (Appendix B) and students (Appendix C) after having been informed about the purpose and methods of the study. Collecting consent from students is a very important step in the research and should give the participants the option to reverse consent at any time. Students were invited to choose a nickname. The purpose and methods of the study were explained to students in L1 (students were told they would be recorded while speaking in pairs, groups and individually). All the information in the consent forms was written in a child friendly language. Even though all students agreed to participate in this study, one parent did not give permission. Any reference to this student was excluded from the data.

II.2.1.2 Classroom strategies (pre study phase)

The introduction of TBL considered by many as innovative is not as linear as it may at first glance seem, especially to a teacher with little experience. Thus, different conditions such as creating a safe learning environment, providing practice in listening and speaking and maximizing the use of L2 were fundamental steps to implement TBL.
I believe that the use of these classroom strategies could be seen as my pre task in the sense that implementing TBL was the task itself.

In order to implement five tasks it was firstly necessary to scaffold students by building the foundations of oral interaction. When I started my practicum I noticed that learners were not used to working in pairs or groups with their mainstream teacher. To provide practice in oral interaction I started to implement simple speaking activities from the course book (e.g. Point and Say, Chinese Whispers, What’s Missing, Happy Families).

Later I adapted activities from the course book. Firstly, I adapted a pair-work activity with mini-cards (Appendix D) to a speaking task, a survey (Appendix E). Secondly, I adapted an interview (Appendix F) from the course book and transformed it into a different task interview (Appendix G). Lastly, I adapted a game from the textbook (Appendix H) and created a board game (Appendix I). Finally, I supplemented the course book by implementing speaking tasks 4 (Appendix J) and 5 (Appendix K).

From lesson number three onwards I used only L2 in my teaching. I interacted with students using the target language in several steps of the lessons: to rephrase their utterances; to give simple and clear instructions so learners understood what they were supposed to do; and to model the activities and tasks. I used only English to teach because it was a way to increase my students’ exposure to L2. Another strategy aimed at improving speaking skills was the use of a mystery box (Appendix L), from which the students had to pick up a question from the box (with eyes closed) read the question and choose a colleague to answer. Then the student who answered chose another colleague. The game could take as many times as the students wanted. This activity was carried out several times through the first term to begin or to end the lesson in an engaging way or to work as a strategy of classroom management when all the activities in the lesson plan had been carried out and there was still time before the end of the lesson. Therefore, students got practice in asking and answering questions about personal information.

As time went by, students got used to speaking with their peers and interacting with the teacher using classroom language (Appendix M), e.g. “Can I come in, please? / Can I go to the toilet?” The use of these classroom strategies gave students
opportunities to more intensive exposure and use of L2. These were the steps for the implementation of TBL.

Assuming that learners acquire the new language through a process of personal “interlanguage” (Selinker, 1972) development, error is a part of the process and penalizing it is counterproductive. This was something I have always kept in mind during my practicum.

II.2.1.3 Speaking Tasks
The tasks were invented and re adapted from Ellis & Brewster (2014), Read (2007) and from Willis (1996) and transformed to fit this specific class, in this specific context and classroom environment. They were adapted to fulfil the needs of this mixed ability class and improve speaking skills.

In the present research speaking activities and speaking tasks have different meanings because their essence is not the same. For less experienced teachers they can be seen as similar because the supposed outcome is achieved, that is to get learners to speak. However, speaking activities, I believe, are mechanical and are grounded on repetition, while speaking tasks are meaningful they usually involve an information gap, and are grounded on real communication. According to Willis (1996, p.23) “tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome.”

Five speaking tasks (Appendixes E, G, I, J and K) were implemented during my practicum. They were designed to supplement the course book and thus to answer the need of improving speaking skills with this specific group of students. Their main aims were to provide practice in listening and speaking for specific information; to provide practice in oral interaction; to provide practice in oral production; to develop fluency; to develop pronunciation and to maximize the use of L2 in the classroom. Each task was modeled by the teacher with a strong student (a different student for each task).

In speaking task 1 (Appendix E), a survey, students were invited to interact with different colleagues in each activity. Students had to ask “Can you (sing)?” and answer “Yes, I can / No, I can’t”. In speaking task 2 (Appendix G), students had to invent an
interview and pretend to be a journalist or a famous person and broadcast the interview to an imaginary audience.

In speaking task 3 (Appendix I), the class was set up in six groups and the students played a board game. This task had two different levels of challenge: level 1 and level 2. In the board game level 1 – ‘mixed groups’ composed by one strong student and the other average or weaker students - students were expected to read, all questions that were written down, and interact orally asking and answering for specific information. In the board game level 2 – ‘strong groups’ two of four participants were strong students - students were expected to interact orally asking and answering for specific information, the only written information was on special squares.

In speaking task 4 (Appendix J), I set up the class in pairs and students played an information gap task, in which student A had the missing information of student B and vice versa.

Lastly, in speaking task 5 (Appendix K), learners rebuilt a dialogue in pairs, pretending they were at a Christmas shop. I introduced the task by showing cards of a Christmas shop, a shop assistant and a customer, questioning learners about them (What’s this? Who is she? Who is he?). In this task, cards with images were displayed on the board. The pre task consisted of drilling a dialogue with the objective of providing input for learners to be able to produce their own dialogue while they were carrying out the task. Learners were told they could “buy” whatever they wanted at the Christmas shop, they could choose the time when the action took place and they could sell a Christmas tree for one euro or one hundred euros. They had freedom of choice to manage their oral performance. Speaking tasks 1, 2 and 3 were adapted from the course book and speaking tasks 4 and 5 were invented to supplement the course book.

II.2.1.4 Audio recordings

I used my cell phone to record all students’ interactions while they were performing the speaking tasks above. The speaking tasks were recorded in the classroom and analyzed qualitatively in order to show evidence of learners’ oral
interactions and oral production, levels of engagement, as well as the roles learners freely assumed when assigned to work in pairs and in groups. The Role-play (speaking task 5) was analyzed quantitatively to show the percentage of L1 and L2 used, as well as the use of the drilled language and the use of learners’ own language. In addition, the grammar correctness was taken into account.

II.2.1.5 Learning Journal

A learning journal was kept during my practicum. It aimed at making a record of the first impressions soon after classes or of some thoughts after listening to the audio recordings. I also took notes when something surprised me during the classes. Ideas and expectations were also written in the form of entries. Then I reflected about these entries and found support for some of my thoughts in the literature. The main ideas related to improving speaking skills are presented in section II.3 and are expressed as quotes.

II.2.1.6 Student Questionnaires

In the last day of my practicum I handed out a questionnaire (Appendix N) to the class. 25 students completed the questionnaire, aimed at gaining an insight of the perceptions of YLs towards the speaking tasks. It has two closed questions. The question number 1 was: “What was your favourite task?” The question number 2 was: “In which task did you feel more confident to speak in English?” It also has the open question “Why?” that follows each of the two closed questions.

The two closed questions of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively and results are expressed in tables 1 and 2. The open question was analyzed qualitatively. They are presented in the section II.3 of this paper.
II.3 Results

The following section analyses the results of the data collected. It aimed to gather information related to the central questions of this action research:

1 - How can the teacher adapt the textbook to produce tasks that develop speaking skills?

2 – How do tasks develop oral interaction and oral production?

II.3.1 Using activities from the course book

II.3.1.1 Mini cards activity

The transcript below shows how a stronger student (Hipopótamo) and an average student (Cobra) interacting orally by asking and answering questions about actions using mini cards in a guessing game from the course book (Appendix D). The audio was recorded in the classroom while other pairs were performing the same activity. This is an example of a speaking activity and it exemplifies how this is somehow mechanical in contrast to the further analysis of speaking tasks, which were more effective at developing interaction.

Code: underlined vowels: accentuated extension of the sound of vowel; italic words: invented and incorrect words.

Transcript 1:
1. Cobra: Are... you singing?
2. Hipopótamo: Yes. I am. Are you running?
3. Cobra: No, I’m not.
4. Hipopótamo: Are you eating?
5. Cobra: No, I’m not.
6. Hipopótamo: Are you playing football?
7. Cobra: Yes, I am. Are you *play* computer games?
8. Hipopótamo: No, I’m not.
9. Cobra: Are you eating?
10. Hipopótamo: No, I’m not.
11. Cobra: Are you *dreamaing* (drawing)?
12. Hipopótamo: No, I’m not.
13. Cobra: Are you running?
15. Cobra: *Widding* (reading)?
16. Hipopótamo: No, I’m not.
17. Cobra: (9 seconds of pause) ...singing?
19. Cobra: (5 seconds of pause) uiting ... eating?
20. Hipopótamo: (enthusiastic tone) Yes, I am!
21. Cobra: (breathe with relief)

The analysis of the speech above confirms, I believe, that the activity was successfully completed, because learners used L2. However, some important aspects have to be taken into consideration when analyzing the transcript. It may seem that learners were just repeating a structure, but in fact they were interacting because they were helping each other to construct the discourse. It was expected that the stronger learner would recast utterances 11, 15 and 19, helping the average learner. However, Hipopótamo was losing his engagement on the activity probably because it was not challenging enough for him. On the other hand, Cobra was somehow struggling to recall the structure and the words. They were involved in the activity but not actively engaged, as they were repeating and not using language in a meaningful way. In other words, they were carrying out a speaking activity, not a speaking task.

Speaking is not repeating. However, repetition is important for beginners because it improves fluency, pronunciation and automaticity of the language. Although some speaking activities promote opportunities for oral interaction, they do not sow seeds to promote oral production, as tasks do.

The transcript is a paradigmatic example of a speaking activity that relies on repetition. Course books have got lots of activities like the one analyzed above. They are necessary and positive to provide practice in repetition of new structures and words, to improve pronunciation, fluency and automaticity of language. Though for some strong students, like Hipopótamo, activities like this could be not engaging.

II.3.2 Adapting the course book

II.3.2.1 Speaking Task 1: Survey

The course book suggested a pair work with mini cards (the activity in section II.3.1.1). One learner had to ask about actions e.g. “Are you running? The other had to answer “Yes, I am. / No I’m not”. I adapted the speaking activity from the course book, a guessing game, into a speaking task, a survey (Appendix E).
I handed a chart to students and the objective of the task was to find different colleagues for each activity. The students all got up at the same time and started the survey. I observed students while they were performing the task and I noticed that all learners were using the structure Can you...? Yes, I can. / No, I can’t and never used L1. They were completely engaged and motivated and “I was surprised about the reasonable noise levels, the students were speaking only English and they were engaging in quick conversations with each other, and interactions were dynamic. Children were happy and focused. I thought it would be noisy and stirring, since they were standing up, but it ended being stirring in an excellent way, the weaker ones, even the special needs students were actively participating. I got surprised that some learners included me and my co op in their survey." (Reflection journal, 21/11/2017)

This type of tasks not only fostered oral interaction, but it gave the learner more freedom of choice, it is the learner who managed who he wanted to ask questions. The task did not inhibit children for asking questions to a colleague instead of other, due to rapid conversations and dynamic interactions (students were all stood up). This task also strengthened affective bonds between students and the teacher because students had the opportunity to ask questions to her.

This task suited a mixed ability class, because it fulfilled the needs of the weaker students, by its easiness. Therefore, weaker students felt confident to use L2. It also fulfilled the needs of the strongest students due to its fun nature. In fact, students repeated a structure but in a meaningful way, because they had a purpose to use language, which was to find out activities peers could and could not do.

**II.3.2.2 Speaking Task 2: Interview**

The course book suggested a pair work activity (Appendix F) about the ‘Wh-questions (What time? and When?). I transformed it into a task (Appendix G) by following important criteria. Firstly, the questions and answers were not given to students as in the course book. They had to prepare the interview themselves using all linguistic resources they had. Students had freedom to choose all questions and answers in the interview. Secondly, they had to choose one of the two roles: journalist or famous people. This aspect is very important with YLs because it takes into
consideration the role of pretending in a child’s world. Because they were pretending it also took into account the fun nature of the task. These aspects were not taken into consideration in the course book.

The objective of the task was to revise and consolidate personal information in pairs, to provide practice in oral interaction and oral production and to improve fluency: “Some students were looking for questions in the notebook or in the course book, others were deciding in L1 what to ask, the weaker ones asked for my help to recall words or questions, they were all enthusiastically engaged” (Reflection journal, 30/11/2017).

“As learners were preparing the task I noticed that some learners went straight to the task cycle that is, they started to ask personal questions and they felt no need to rehearse” (Reflection journal, 30/11/2017). These students were the stronger students, who produced questions spontaneously. This suggests that these students could not only interact, but also produce their own language. During the audio recordings analysis some patterns emerged. Some strong students who played the journalists did not prepare the interview, they simply started asking. The transcript below shows the interaction between Hipopótamo, the strong student and Falcão, the weak student:

Transcript 2:

1. Hipopótamo: What’s your name?
2. Falcão: My name is Francisco.
3. Hipopótamo: No…o do Chaster
4. Falcão: Não temos que ensaiar?
6. Falcão: Ok.
7. Hipopótamo: What’s your name?
8. Falcão: My name is Chaster. (Chester)

Transcript 2 shows how a strong student (Hipopótamo) automatically assumed the role leader in this task. It also shows that the weaker student (Falcão) accepted unquestionably his peer decision (lines 4, 5 and 6). I included this transcript to show evidence of how strong students are able to take the lead in tasks and make decisions. It is shown that it was the strong student who decided the questions. He completely assumed the journalist role. The same kind of leadership emerged in other groups.
composed by a strong student and a weak student. According to Dörnyei & Murphey (2003) the term ‘role’ has been widely used in group dynamics because of the observation that every member fills at least one role in a group and that this role greatly determines how the student will function. Learners’ roles are important for the success of the task performance (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003).

Other patterns emerged during the analysis. More homogeneous groups composed of a strong or an average student and an average student invented the interview together as the following transcript shows. Pantera is the average student and Águia is the strong student.

Transcript 3:
1. Pantera: pode ser...what’s your name, how old are you...my...birthday...a cor preferida...o animal preferido, a colour...
2. Águia: what’s your favourite colour?
3. Pantera: Sim.
4. Águia: também...what’s your favourite food...

The outcome of this task was to be audio recording by the teacher, pretending it was a radio interview. My phone ‘was’ the microphone which ‘broadcasted’ the interview to an imaginary audience. In spite of students being told that they could ask anything, all the interviews were based on questions about personal information. It is suggested that students learnt to ask and answer about personal information due to the mystery box activity (Appendix L). “Students were completely enthusiastic about being their idol. The stronger students chose to be the journalists.” (Reflection journal, 30/11/2017) The choice of being the journalists, the ones who conduct the interview, made by the stronger students meet the hypothesis mentioned earlier in this paper, that they tend to be the leaders in the tasks.

The audio recordings also show that six strong students went straight to the interview phase without “rehearsing”. It suggests they were able to speak (ask) about personal information spontaneously. The average and weak students rehearsed the interview. Some of them wrote down the questions and others did not. All students were actively engaged. Therefore, I can conclude that the task was challenging enough.
II.3.2.3 Speaking task 3: Board Game

The objective of the task was revise and consolidate the language from the first two units from the syllabus. I designed the materials for all the speaking tasks implemented, but this one was the most demanding in terms of designing authentic materials. The course book also provided a game of this nature (Appendix I), which is also a task according to the definition by Willis (1996). However, I adapted the task from the book because my objective was to improve speaking skills and the game from the book focused on other skills apart from speaking. I created the boards games (Appendix I). Two of the board games were designed for the ‘strong groups’, there were no questions written down, just in the special squares. Four of the board games were designed for the ‘mixed groups’, in which all the questions were written down. In the six board games all squares were related to places and actions at school, the time and the weather. Students played the game in groups, taking turns and rolling the dice as they were moving on the game answering to the questions. The main rule was to use English to play the game. The student who used L1 missed a turn.

The following transcript presents the interaction of a ‘mixed group’ in which the interlocutors are Libelinha (strong student), Foca (weak student), Tatu (average student), and Tigre (special needs student).

Transcript 4:
13. Libelinha, Tatu, Tigre: five…one, two, three, four, five
14. Tatu: what time...
15. (Libelinha interrups Tatu)
16. Libelinha: What are they doing?
17. Foca: It’s...
18. Libelinha: (whispering) running.
20. Libelinha: (whispering) ok.
21. Tatu: Yes.
22. Libelinha: My turn!
(...)
30. Tatu, Libelinha: what...what is he doing?
31. Tigre: an..
32. Libelinha: Ok...
33. Tigre: widding? (reading)
34. Libelinha: reading, yes!
35. Libelinha: Foca!
36. Tatu: Foca!
(...)
45. Tatu: What’s the weather like?
46. Libelinha: What’s the weather like?
47. Tigre: It’s running.
48. Libelinha: It’s...It’s raining, rain...
49. Libelinha, Tatu, Tigre: five, one, three, four, five.
50. Libelinha: Go back three squares.
51. Libelinha, Tatu, Tigre: one, two, three.
52. Libelinha, Tatu: What’s the weather like?
53. Tigre: Sonny.
54. Libelinha: Sunny...yes...
55. Libelinha, Tatu, Foca: three...one, two, three.
56. Libelinha: No, no...ah...yes, yes go back two...three squares.
57. Tatu: What’s the weather like?
58. Libelinha: It’s sunny.
59. Foca: It’s sunny.
60. Tigre: It’s...

(...) 
68. Libelinha: What is she doing?
69. Tigre: aaaa...
70. Libelinha: (whispering) she’s dancing...
71. Tatu: (whispering) dancing...
72. Tigre: dansick. (dancing)
73. Libelinha: dancing.

The transcript immediately suggests how Libelinha (strong student) assumed the leader role in the interaction with others. Her willingness to speak and play the game became very obvious from the way she took the lead in the oral task. Tatu was also communicating actively. Both students seemed as if they were carrying on a healthy competition in an oral interaction. During the dialogue we could observe the strong and the average students helping their peers by providing the necessary input for them to be able to carry out the task in the target language (lines 18, 19, 70 and 71). Libelinha also gives positive reinforcement to her peers (lines 20, 21, 34, 48, 54). It is suggested that she assumed ‘teacher’s role’ and helped her peers, by rephrasing. Libelinha was able to produce her own utterances, which were spontaneous language (lines 22 and 56).

Lines 57, 58, 59 and 60 suggest how learners learn in interaction with the other (contextualized input) in a contextualized setting (task). Tatu asked about the weather and Libelinha answered correctly in turn. In the following moments of silence one
heard Foca (line 59) and Tigre (line 60) whispering the chunk of language. “even though Foca and Tigre didn’t seem as actively engaged in the task as Libelinha and Tatu, they were increasingly more focused as the game progressed” (Reflection journal, 5/12/2017). It is suggested that Foca and Tigre were actively engaged because they were actively listening. In lines 35 and 36 Libelinha and Tatu felt the need to ask for Foca’s attention. As I was audio recording the group, I was observing children’s reactions and interactions. Foca was engaged in the task, but became distracted when the educational assistant came in the classroom to call another student.

The analyzed transcripts and the other audio recordings from this task show a set of common characteristics: firstly the six groups did not use L1 to carry out the task. Secondly, students’ interactions were similar to the transcript above. That is, the strong students tended to assume the role leaders in the ‘mixed groups’. However, in the ‘strong groups’ there is no evidence of leadership, but the perception is that students were playing the game in a comfortable environment, like a group of friends having fun as the following transcript shows. Hipopótamo and Tartaruga are the strong students Manta is the average student and Serpente is the weak student.

Transcript 5:

1. All Ss: Six, one, two, three, four, five, six
2. Hipopótamo: go back three squares…what’s the weather like?
3. Manta: It’s sunny and cloudy.
4. Tartaruga: Yes! Very good!
   (…)
5. All Ss: What’s the weather like?
6. Serpente: What’s the weather like…it’s sunny.
7. Hipopótamo, Manta, Tartaruga: Yes!
   (…)
8. All Ss: One!
9. Hipopótamo: Go back three squares…NO!
10. All Ss: (Laughing)
    (…)
11. Tartaruga: it’s me
    (…)
12. All Ss: two..one..two
13. Manta: Oh my god…what they are doing...
14. Hipopótamo, Tartaruga: What are they doing?
15. Manta: They are running.
16. Tartaruga: It’s me! Tantantum
    (…)
17. All Ss: Three..one, two,three
18. Hipopótamo: oooh..winner...
19. Manta: you are the winner...well done
There were twenty-six students, divided into 6 groups, inside the classroom in a stirring task, still they were autonomous playing the game and interacting with each other. While they were playing the game they were speaking English. Some strong students produced their own dialogue for example, “My turn”, “your turn” and interjections “Oh! No!”. While they were playing the game they were having fun and using language actively.

II.3.3 Supplementing the course book

The course book did not provide speaking activities related to the theme about Christmas. Therefore, I supplemented the course book using two different speaking tasks. The objective of the tasks was to improve oral interaction and oral production, fluency and provide practice in listening and speaking for specific information related to Christmas.

II.3.3.1 Speaking task 4: Fill the Gap

In this task (Appendix J), in pairs, student A had the missing information of student B and vice versa. The objectives of the task are described above. The expected dialogue was “A: What’s in (1-b)? B: Reindeer.” The following transcript shows the interaction in which the interlocutors are Libelinha (strong student) and Tatu (average student).

Transcript 6:

1. Libelinha: What’s in two-a?
2. Tatu: ...toys.
3. Libelinha: It’s a toys.
4. Tatu: No...toys.
5. Libelinha: Ok!
6. Tatu: What’s in one-c?
7. Libelinha: espera... one quê?
8. Tatu: one – c.
9. Libelinha: It’s a star.

In spite of being an easy task in which the learner had to remember the wh-question and one lexical item for each missing space, the transcript above is relevant in terms of further error correction. The transcript shows a strong student, Libelinha,
trying to correct a weaker student, Tatu (line 3). Her correction is inaccurate. On line 4 Tatu refuses his peer’s correction. It suggests that Tatu knows that the answer only requires a word. On the other hand, it suggests that Libelinha is trying to produce her own dialogue using formulaic language (line 3 and 9). The dialogue serves to tell the teacher about further work that needs to be carried out in the classroom. In early stages of learning a new language it is not advisable to teach grammar in an explicit way, because YLs do not have the required meta-language to understand the abstract concepts such as the use of the indefinite article ‘a. (line 3). In this task students were actively engaged asking and answering questions using L2. Tasks like the ones shown above can be used after the drilling of new vocabulary. YLs are then practicing the new vocabulary, but in a meaningful way for them.

II.3.3.2 Speaking task 5: Role-play

The second task related to Christmas was a role-play (Appendix K). Students were supposed to re build a dialogue, in pairs, using the images that were displayed on the board. Students chose one of two roles: the shop assistant and a customer. Then students rebuilt the dialogue, pretending they were at a Christmas shop. Lastly, some pairs role-played the dialogue in front of the class.

At this stage of my practicum learners were used to pair work and the engagement and motivation were intense in the classroom. There were no behaviour issues. This speaking task was analyzed quantitatively to show the percentage of L1 and L2 used, as well as the use of the drilled language or the use of learner’s own language and also the use or not of the correct grammar form. 24 learners were recorded during the performance of the task.
Table 1

Analyses of audio recordings (expressed as number and percentage of utterances of A) L1; B) L2; C) Drilled language; D) Own language; E) Correct form of words/structures of 12 pairs; F) errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uterances of the dialogue</th>
<th>A) Use of L1</th>
<th>B) Use of L2</th>
<th>C) Use of the drilled language</th>
<th>D) Use of their own language</th>
<th>E) Use of correct form of grammar in drilled and own language</th>
<th>F) Use of error in drilled and own language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Greetings (A: Good morning B: Good Morning)</td>
<td>0 (100%)</td>
<td>24 (100%)</td>
<td>24 (100%)</td>
<td>0 (100%)</td>
<td>24 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Buying a present (I’d like a Christmas tree, please.)</td>
<td>0 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>10 (84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Reply (Of course)</td>
<td>0 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>10 (84%)</td>
<td>2 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Asking the price (How much?)</td>
<td>0 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>11 (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- Saying the price (Twenty euros)</td>
<td>0 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>10 (84%)</td>
<td>2 (16%)</td>
<td>7 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6- Giving the purchase to the costumer (Here you are.)</td>
<td>0 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>7 (58%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7- Thank and say goodbye</td>
<td>0 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 clearly shows that 100% of the students use L2 to carry out the task. 100% of the students use the drilled dialogue to greet, to thank and to say goodbye in a correct form. 100% of the students used the new structure “How much” correctly. 33% of the students use their own dialogue to buy the present, in the group of the four students who change the word Christmas tree, 2 used ‘star’ and other two used ‘toys’. Results show that all students were able to carry out the task using L2. They were pretending they were at the Christmas shop and they were able to use the language to communicate. Table 1 shows how much L2 was used in this task and it is an indicator that TBL did not lead to widespread use of L1, contradicting thus one of the major criticisms to this methodology, previously mentioned.

One student (Cobra) was able to invent her own dialogue:

1. Cobra: It’s a star, please.

16% of the students used their own utterances to say the price:

2. Falcão: three euros.
It is interesting to notice that two weaker learners invented different prices from the drilled dialogue. It is also very interesting to observe how Cobra (average student) invented her own way to ask for a purchase. These results suggest that tasks enables the learner’s internal mechanisms of producing language. According to Willis (1996) beginners can begin to make themselves understood by learning a lot of words together with a small stock of well-chosen formulaic phrases and sentence stems. As their experience increases, they notice typical forms and patterns in language and the grammar starts to fall into place. They begin to explore different ways of expressing more exactly what they want to mean (p.118).

II.3.4 Student questionnaires

Table 2 shows students’ preferences regarding the speaking tasks. The questionnaire (appendix N) was carried out in the last day of my practicum. 25 students completed the questionnaire.

Table 2: Results for the question “What was your favourite task?”

The favourite task was the interview and from the open question why a pattern emerged. The ten students who chose this task as their favourite said that it was fun to pretend to be famous and furthermore their answers were similar to the one given by Rato who said: “Porque podíamos escolher quem quiséssemos/ Because we could choose who we wanted to be”. This suggests that this freedom of choice is something to bear in mind when designing tasks. This suggests that teachers should understand
what triggers YLs’ motivation. The survey was the second most voted task. It was chosen by the weaker students who justified their choice based on two factors: fun and easiness, like the answer from Serpente who said: “Porque foi a mais fácil de falar Inglês./Because it was the easiest to speak in English” or the one given by Maria-café, who said: “Porque foi muito divertido perguntar aos colegas se conseguiam fazer o que se perguntava. Ainda por cima em Inglês! /Because it was really fun to ask to the colleagues if they could do what I asked. More in English!” TBL fulfilled YLs’ needs. TBL fostered the development of speaking skills because learners were using the language to carry out the tasks and simultaneously they were pretending to be a famous person, playing a game and having fun without realizing they are acquiring the L2.

Table 3: Results for the question “In which task did you feel more comfortable to speak English?”

Table 3 shows that learners felt more comfortable to speak L2 in the oral task survey. The results of the open question “why” shows that the survey was the most voted task by learners due to the fun and easiness of it. I found pertinent the answer by Pantera who said: “Porque já me tinha habituado a falar Inglês./Because I got used to speaking in English”. It suggests that exposure and use were effectively achieved.

Hipopótamo, one of the students who chose the role-play, said: “Porque passámos a saber falar só com desenhos /Because we came to know how to talk only with drawings” and Cobra, other student who chose the role-play, said: “Porque sentia que estava a falar melhor por isso descontrai /Because I felt I was speaking better so I relaxed”. While other student, Tartaturga, who chose the board game said: “Porque tínhamos um grupo e assim podíamos ter ajuda /Because we had a group so we could
have help”. These results suggests that strong students, like Hipopótamo needed challenging tasks to get engaged and to improve his communicative competence. Cobra’s answer shows that confidence is directly related to oral performance and lastly Tartaruga’s answer shows the primary benefit of TBL, which is learning how to speak in interaction with peers. Results from the questionnaire show evidence of the importance of adapting and supplementing the course book to fulfill a specific group of learners. Moreover, they suggest that when creating speaking tasks for YLs, teachers should take the following criteria into consideration: level of freedom of the task, the role of pretending in a child’s world, the fun nature of the task and the adequate level of challenge to engage learners and meet their proficiency levels.

II.4 Discussion and conclusion

II.4.1 Brief summary of research questions and findings

This chapter will present the conclusions of the study answering the questions “How can the teacher adapt the course book to produce tasks that develop speaking skills?” and “How do tasks develop oral interaction and oral production?” The main goal of this project was to verify the opportunities for oral interaction and oral production provided by speaking tasks.

TBL is a methodology that aims to develop students’ communicative competence. It was necessary to create the conditions to implement TBL, firstly by using classrooms strategies such as routines, maximizing the use of classroom language, foster all interactions in the classroom in L2 and using appealing activities for YLs like, for example, the mystery box (Appendix L). Secondly, it was also necessary to give time to students get used to pair work using simple activities from the course book, like for example point and say, and providing exposure, like teaching the classes using only L2, to English. Afterwards all students got used to interact in L2 and felt confident to speak. According to Willis (1996, p.118) “when teaching beginners, we need to give them a lot of exposure to the new language, and to make that exposure comprehensible”.

In order to improve speaking skills and to fulfill students’ needs I adapted the coursebook. I implemented five different speaking tasks. They were a way to
supplement the course book, which was appealing to YLs although the activities in it were not sufficient to foster the development of oral interaction and oral production. According to ‘Metas’ State Curriculum for the 1st cycle (Bravo, Cravo & Duarte, 2015), students’s oral performances achieved the objectives based on their linguistic proficiency (A1 CEFR level). Willis (1996, p.118) defends that “a task-based approach encourages beginners because it values what learners can achieve no matter how little language they have.”

Students were undoubtly motivated and engaged while performing the speaking tasks. I found that the implemented tasks met important criteria: they were fun for children, YLs enjoy to have freedom of choice towards the task, they like to pretend, and tasks had the adequate level of challenge to engage learners and meet their proficiency levels. Ellis (2009) argues that the nature of interaction in the TBL classroom depends on the design and implementation of the task and the proficiency level of the students themselves. Nonetheless speaking tasks fulfill children’s need to communicate and they provided opportunities to use the language in a meaningful way. Fun and play is a part of children’s everyday life and it can be promoted inside the classroom therefore contributing to the cognitive and social development of YLs.

II.4.2 Contribution of the results to my development as a teacher

Due to my own experience as a language student, and in spite of the theoretical background provided by this master’s degree, before I began my practicum I had some doubts regarding the successful implementation of TBL. On the other hand, due to my reduced experience as a teacher I had some insecurities towards implementing more innovative teaching approaches. However, while students had fun completing the tasks and using L2, my motivation also increased as I realized the advantages of speaking tasks.

Criticisms pointed against TBL claim that this methodology leads to the widespread use of L1, little L2 production, and discipline challenges for teachers (Carless, 2002). My research, in contrast, shows that it is possible to implement tasks in which students maximize their use of L2 and that behaviour problems can be managed. I learnt that creating an effective task is to give learners freedom of choice
in preparation and performance of the oral task. Their levels of confidence, enthusiasm and motivation were higher in the tasks where they had more freedom of choice.

Due to my research I learnt a new teaching approach which I had never used before. I learnt how to teach language as real communication. As mentioned earlier, speaking is not repeating. Therefore, I learnt how to adapt activities from the textbook to produce and design tasks that fostered the development of oral interaction and oral production.

II.4.3 Relevance of results to other classrooms

In state schools tasks can be incorporated into the syllabus, from the easiest to more demanding ones and they can be adapted to any topic, and to students’ needs. In private schools, holders of pedagogical autonomy or in areas where English is taught as an extra curriculum activity, teachers can fully implement a task based teaching approach. Teachers can design a complete unit with tasks, in order to foster the development of the four skills. I believe it is advisable to implement the easier tasks first and gradually increase the level of the difficulty. A fill the gap, survey or re-building a dialogue can be incorporated at the beginning of the school year and more demanding tasks, such as interviews or board games are likely to be successful when learners get plenty of exposure to use of the target language. Pinter (2006, p.56) points out that

at the beginning stages with children it is a good idea to focus on simple but purposeful and meaningful pattern drilling and personalized dialogue building in order to prepare them to be able to talk about themselves and their world and to begin to interact with their friends in class and other speakers of the language (p.56).

The speaking tasks used in my research can be modified and adapted to any topic of the syllabus, thus improving YLs speaking skills. Students learn English by speaking the language. Moreover, I believe that TBL not only fosters the development of speaking skills, the object of the present study, but it also provides opportunities for the holistic development of the student.
REFERENCES


LIST OF TABLES

Table 1             Analysis of speaking task 5
Table 2             Results of Question 1 of Student Questionnaires
Table 3             Results of Question 2 of Student Questionnaires
Appendix A – Consent Letter to School

Pedido de autorização ao Diretor do Agrupamento Escolas de ________.

Exmo. Sr. Diretor,

O meu nome é Vanessa Feiteiro e é com muito gosto que manifesto o meu interesse em desenvolver o meu projeto de investigação na Escola Básica de.

Estou a fazer o Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo, na Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova, Lisboa, e o mestrado implica que durante o estágio faça um pequeno projeto de investigação. Este projeto será incluído no meu relatório final. O meu trabalho intitula-se: *How does Task Based Learning foster the development of speaking skills in the Young Learner classroom* (*De que forma o método de aprendizagem por tarefas potencia o desenvolvimento das competências da oralidade no 1º ciclo*).

Assim, venho, por este meio, solicitar autorização para desenvolver o meu projeto de investigação durante o 1º período do presente ano letivo 2017/2018, com início a setembro e término em dezembro de 2017.

Depois de pedir autorização aos encarregados de educação para incluir os respetivos educandos no meu estudo, e também aos alunos da turma, a recolha de dados será efetuada mediante a realização de tarefas que promovam a comunicação oral. As aulas serão planificadas de acordo com o manual, reutilizando as atividades propostas para que as mesmas sejam mais estimulantes ao nível do desenvolvimento das competências da oralidade.

Durante as tarefas acima referidas, os dados obtidos para o projeto de investigação serão recolhidos através de grelhas de observação, questionários e gravação áudio. A qualquer momento os alunos poderão escolher não participar. As informações obtidas serão referidas no meu relatório final e eventualmente em artigos académicos e conferências.

*A instituição, todos os seus funcionários e as crianças permanecerão anónimos em qualquer circunstância.*

Se houver questões a colocar estarei disponível para esclarecer através do e-mail vanessapereirafeiteiro@gmail.com

28 de setembro de 2017
Vanessa Feiteiro
Aluna do mestrado de Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo do Ensino Básico

Carolyn Leslie
Orientadora de Estágio
FCSH, Universidade Nova Lisboa

Eu, ______________________________________________________________________,

Diretor do Agrupamento Escolas de, declaro que fui informado(a) dos objetivos do projeto de investigação intitulado *How does Task Based Learning foster the development of speaking skills in the Young Learner classroom* (*De que forma o método de aprendizagem por tarefas potencia o desenvolvimento das competências da oralidade no 1º ciclo*) e autorizo Vanessa Pereira Santos Feiteiro a desenvolvê-lo na turma da Escola Básica de.

Data: __________________________

Assinatura: ______________________________________________________________________
Caros pais e encarregados de educação,

Chamo-me Vanessa Pereira Santos Feiteiro e é com muito gosto que irei estar com o seu educando a estagiari durante o 1º período deste ano letivo. Estou a fazer o Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo na Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova, Lisboa, e o mestrado implica que durante o estágio faça um pequeno projeto de investigação. Este projeto será incluído no meu relatório final. O meu trabalho intitula-se: *How does Task Based Learning foster the development of speaking skills in Young Learner classroom* (*De que forma o método de aprendizagem por tarefas potencia o desenvolvimento das competências da oralidade no 1º ciclo*).

Venho, por este meio, solicitar a vossa autorização para poder incluir o seu educando neste projeto que vai decorrer entre setembro e dezembro de 2017 durante o período habitual das aulas de Inglês.

Depois de pedir autorização ao seu educando para a/o incluir no meu estudo a recolha de dados será efetuada durante as aulas de Inglês, portanto o seu educando/a irá assistir normalmente às mesmas. Espera-se que os alunos participem nas atividades, nomeadamente nas tarefas que promovem o desenvolvimento das competências orais, já que o objetivo de aprender uma língua é conseguir comunicar nessa mesma língua. A recolha de dados para o meu projeto de investigação será feita através de gravação áudio e grelhas de observação a preencher por mim. A qualquer momento o seu educando pode escolher não participar. As informações obtidas serão referidas no meu relatório final de mestrado e eventualmente em artigos académicos e conferências.

**A instituição, todos os seus funcionários e as crianças permanecerão anónimas em qualquer circunstância. Nunca serão tiradas fotografias nem obtidas imagens, nem da instituição nem das crianças.**

Se tiver questões a colocar agradeço que me contatem pessoalmente através da professora titular de turma.

Agradeço que dê autorização para que o seu educando possa participar no meu estudo. Peço que entregue esta autorização assinada até ao dia 11 de outubro.

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Lisboa, 25, Setembro de 2017

Dra. Vanessa Feiteiro

Professora Doutora Carolyn Leslie

Orientadora de Estágio

FGSH, Universidade Nova Lisboa

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Eu, __________________________________________________________

Encarregado de educação de __________________________________________________________

Declaro que fui informado(a) dos objetivos do projeto intitulado *How does Task Based Learning foster the development of speaking skills in Young Learner classroom* (*De que forma o método de aprendizagem por tarefas potencia o desenvolvimento das competências da oralidade no 1º ciclo*).

Data: __________________________

Assinatura: ______________________________________________________________________
Appendix C – Consent Letter to Students

O estudo da Vanessa, a teacher estudante

Olá ☺ Chamo-me Vanessa e estou muito contente e ansiosa por ser a tua “professora estudante”! Este outono será muito divertido a aprender e a falar Inglês! ☺

Eu estou a estudar para ser professora como a tua teacher Vera. Este ano vou fazer um projeto com a tua turma e gostava MUITO que fizesse parte do meu estudo. Vamos fazer várias atividades como jogos, canções, trabalhos de grupo e trabalhos a pares onde vais aprender a comunicar em Inglês…YES!!! ☺

O que é que tens que fazer? Trazer boa disposição e muita energia para participares nas atividades que vamos desenvolver ao longo do 1º período. Sei que vamos divertir-nos enquanto aprendemos. Estás preparado para te juntares a mim nesta aventura?

Podes escolher não participar ou podes a qualquer momento decidir não querer participar mais, mas eu gostava muito que me acompanhasses nesta aventura até ao fim! ☺ O teu encarregado de educação deu autorização para participares.

Durante as atividades que vamos realizar eu vou gravar a tua voz para depois usar no meu trabalho final. Não te preocupes que vou mudar o teu nome e ninguém vai saber que és tu. Ou seja, todas as informações que eu recolher serão anónimas.

Tal como tu, eu também estou a estudar e sei que dá muito trabalho. Mas se estivermos alegres e com vontade torna-se mais fácil, não é? Conto contigo para me ajudares a estudar. Achas que somos capazes? Eu tenho a certeza que sim! Yes, we can! ☺

Name: ______________________________________________________________________

Nickname: ________________________________________________

Sim, quero participar no projeto da teacher Vanessa ☺

Não, não quero participar no projeto da teacher Vanessa ☺
Appendix D – Activity from the course book with mini cards

Seesaw 4, Texto Editores
### Appendix E: Speaking task 1 - survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Find someone who...</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can sing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can dance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can hop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can play the piano</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can speak English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can play football</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can draw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: Activity from the course book – Interview

*Seesaw 4, Texto Editores, p. 21*
Appendix G – Speaking task 2: Interview

Students invent their interview and choose roles: journalist or famous person, also choose the famous they want to pretend to be.
Appendix H – Game from the course book

2. All cards Shuffle all cards. A member from each pair/group rolls the dice. He or she must identify the colour it lands on and take a card. The dice is rolled again to see the task to be carried out.

- If it lands on 1, the player draws.
- On 2, the player mimes.
- On 3, the player asks.
- On 4, the player lip-reads.
- On 5, the player spells.
- On 6, the team chooses what task to carry out.

If they get it right, they keep the card. The team with the most cards at the end of the game wins.

Seesaw 4, Texto Editores
Appendix I– Speaking task 3: Board game

Level 1 – ‘Mixed Groups’

Level 2 – ‘Strong Groups’
## Appendix J – Speaking task 4: Fill the Gap

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student A</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>🦌</td>
<td></td>
<td>🎁</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>🎅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>🎄</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>🎁</td>
<td>🎁</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Christmas tree" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Toy box" /></td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Reindeer" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Star" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Gifts" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Santa" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Santa's sleigh" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Christmas tree" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K – Speaking task 5: Role Play rebuild a dialogue
Appendix L – Mystery Box
Appendix M – Classroom language
Appendix N – Student Questionnaire

Students’ opinions regarding speaking tasks

Name: ________________________________
Nickname: ____________________________
Date: ________________________________

READ AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS:

1 – What was your favourite task? Qual foi a tua tarefa preferida?

A – Fill the Gap
B – Interview
C – Survey
D – Board Game
E – Role-play at the Christmas shop

Why? Porquê?__________________________

2 – In which task did you feel more comfortable to speak English?

A – Fill the Gap
B – Interview
C – Survey
D – Board Game
E – Role play at the Christmas shop

Why? Porquê?__________________________

Thank you!