

***Teaching Portuguese as a Host Language for Immigrants/Refugees in Situations of Social Vulnerability in Goias/Brazil***

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**Abstract**

This paper aims at presenting a project held at Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Goias (IFG), Brazil, which works with vulnerable immigrants/refugees in Goiania and surrounding cities. These people come to Goias in search of better conditions of life and depend on the Portuguese language as an instrument of social and labor insertion. For this reason, this project has two main goals: to provide college students (teachers-to-be) with teaching education and experience, and to improve the acquisition of Portuguese as a host language (PHL) by immigrants/refugees, i.e., as an instrument of mediation between immigrants/refugees and society, allied in the process of adaptation and belonging to the new environment. The team is composed of linguists, professionals from the fields of arts, health, human rights, psychology, hospitality and computer science and by under-graduate students of Portuguese and Dance. The activities are organized in three parts: (1) training workshops for the students on immigrant rights, health, culture, cultural conflicts, and teaching-learning theories of PHL, and (2) PHL and culture classes and for immigrants/refugees, taught by students under the supervision of linguists/teachers; (3) lectures and workshops for the participants on various topics. Immigrants living in Goias face significant difficulties in terms of integration, particularly regarding entry into the labor market. These difficulties translate into a high rate of unemployment, downward professional mobility and a process of loss of self-esteem and social exclusion. This project is relevant as an attempt to minimize these difficulties and help immigrants/refugees adaptation/integration process.

Keywords: immigrants, refugees, hosting, PHL, teaching-learning, teacher education.

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## Introduction

This project, by means of a course of Portuguese as a Host Language (PHL), is aimed at immigrants in vulnerable situations, especially Haitians, who are based in Goiania (capital of Goias state, in Brazil) and surrounding cities. These people depend on language as an instrument of social and labor insertion. For this reason, the main objective of the project is to improve the acquisition of the Portuguese language, facilitating the integration of immigrants and improving life quality for these people. In addition, partnerships with other *campi* and community members provide workshops on health and civil and labor rights, as well as psychological support and cultural activities such as performing arts and dance.

The Portuguese course is based on the communicative approach of language teaching (ALMEIDA FILHO, 1993) and on Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FREIRE, 1970; 1982; 1995; 1997) and uses the methodology of language teaching for specific purposes (BRUNTON, 2009; CELANI, 1988, 2005a, 2005b, 2009a; HUTCHINSON; WATERS, 1987; RAMOS, 2005, 2009), since the main objective is to meet the urgent linguistic needs of participants in specific situations, such as job application, interaction in the work environment, medical appointments, commercial transactions, among other communicative contexts.

Although the number of immigrants residing in Goias is relatively small compared to other Brazilian states, this group faces significant difficulties in terms of integration, and in particular, entry into the labor market. Immigrants have a limited knowledge of the Portuguese language and are often victims of racism and discrimination. These difficulties translate into a high rate of unemployment among them, in downward mobility paths and in a process of loss of self-esteem and social exclusion, which has worsened over the years and which reflects in the society in which they are inserted. The relevance of this project is still due to the fact that other areas of knowledge are also included besides teaching PHL: arts, health, human rights, psychology, hospitality and information technology. For each of these areas, a professional hold lectures and workshops and, as the language of communication is Portuguese, the heart of the project, teaching PHL, assumes its main role, the host.

From this perspective, we hope, by the end of the project, that the participants will be able to communicate in Portuguese in specific situations of social interaction, making this language the means to assume their places in the society of Goias. We also believe that the participants may have a better life quality, since they will have acquired important knowledge to their daily lives in the country that received them, but that still lacks actions to actually welcome them.

In addition, this project offers students of Portuguese Language and Dance the opportunity to broaden the process of academic-pedagogical formation by experiencing didactic practice and expanding the scope of action as future teachers. For the Portuguese Language degree students, the teaching of PHL is already part of the curricular matrix of the degree course in at IFG. Thus, their participation in this project may enrich the theoretical curricular component of the course with the teaching in practice, helping them to legitimize knowledge and the integration between theory and practice.

## **Immigration and the relevance of PHL learning-teaching**

Immigration is a natural and very old activity which has always been within humanity. Whether for economic, political, religious, social, cultural, gender reasons or even due to natural disasters, thousands of people have left their homeland in search of shelter in different countries. In recent decades, immigration figures in Brazil have significantly grown (BARRETO, 2010; SAO BERNARDO, 2016).

Usually, immigrants face, in addition to difficulties with language, local culture and customs, financial, emotional, health problems and prejudice. Not knowing the language is the biggest barrier to integration and integration into the host society. There are institutions throughout the country developing actions to meet the need to acquire the Portuguese language, even if they are not sufficient for the demand. Most of these actions are established by civil society and Brazilian public universities, since the government, although facilitating the entry of immigrants to the country, does not usually offer other types of support to these people, which makes it difficult for them to have access to language courses, due to the high prices and expenses.

In this way, when we refer to the target language as the host language, we go beyond the notion of a foreign language or a second language. For the adult public, newly immersed in a linguistic-cultural reality not previously experienced, the language use is linked to a various kinds of knowledge, such as knowing how to act and what to do, and the new linguistic-communicative tasks that must be carried out in that language, as well as the possibility of becoming a citizen of this place, culturally and politically conscious, participating as a subject of society. Grosso (2010, p. 71) explains the choice of the host language concept, defining the relationship between the language and the context to which it applies "action oriented, the host language has a know-how that contributes to a real interaction, everyday life, the conditions of life, social conventions and other things that can only be understood in a bidirectional relation".

The author also argues that "when the host language is operationalized in teaching-learning content, its scope goes far beyond the professional domain" (GROSSO, 2010, p.61), however, this level is extremely important for the integration of the individual to the new society. Thus, the communicative needs are linked to tasks and situations that diverge from the culture of origin and that permeate various sectors of life, such as education, work, health, housing, personal relationships etc. However, the concept of host language, as well as teaching and learning this language, to our understanding, also refers to

the emotional and subjective prism of the language and the conflicting relationship in the initial contact of the immigrant with the host society, judging by the vulnerability that these people face when they arrive in a foreign country with the intention of staying in that place. Similarly, we refer to the role of the teacher, whose function in this context is to try to ease the initial conflict between learner and language, allowing him / her to begin to see it as an instrument of mediation between him and the society that receives him / her and perceive it as an ally in the process of adaptation and belonging to the new environment, which is not home. Still,

language can be used as an instrument of fight and transgression. (SAO BERNARDO, 2016, p. 66)

Many cases have been reported in Brazil of immigrants working in conditions similar to slavery, and this is often due to lack of knowledge of the language and, consequently, they do not understand their civil and labor rights, which leads them to a situations of vulnerability. Silva (2017) attests the inhumane conditions of Bolivian immigrants living in the metropolitan region of Sao Paulo, especially in relation to housing, food and work. In this study, the lack of proficiency in the Portuguese language makes routine activities difficult, such as renting a place to live, seeking medical care, access to schools and, as mentioned, entering the job market. This situation is also observed by institutions such as the Immigrant Pastoral of Goiania and INTERREL, which serve vulnerable immigrants in Goias.

The project is designed to help participants develop intercultural communicative competence by acquiring linguistic competence and critical cultural awareness, evoking critical thinking and developing autonomy. The contents are chosen based on the themes of greater impact on the social insertion of these people. In this way, the purpose of the course is to help the participants understand how the host society is organized in relation to work, housing, health, gender relations, as well as to support them in the fight against oppression and cultural domination. The curriculum design is developed from a variety of authentic images and texts of different genres, related to the themes mentioned above as well as *You can enter: Brazilian Portuguese for refugees*, material designed by UNHCR (United Nations Agency for Refugees) and available for free.

### **The project**

As already mentioned before, the project's main goal is to assist in the integration of immigrants in situations of vulnerability in the community of Goias state and to provide students under a degree in education with teaching experience. We also aim at:

- Improving the linguistic performance of the participants so that they can integrate more effectively in order to facilitate the search for employment, improve the relations in the work environment and in other social instances;
- Informing the participants about the rights and duties of immigrants in Brazil, guide them regarding documentation, labor rights and other legal needs;
- Informing the participants about how the Brazilian public (free) health system works, as well as on issues related to personal hygiene, diseases common to the region, among other subjects;
- Offering psychological support to the group, with the intention of minimizing cultural conflicts and problems of integration to the society that welcomes them;
- Promoting artistic and cultural integration between immigrants and the host society at times aimed at the development of activities that value the culture of origin of these people, as well as presenting cultural elements from Brazil and the state of Goias;
- Integrating the training in Portuguese Language and Dance courses to the classroom practice in a context of teaching PHL;

- Developing partnerships with members of the internal and external community aiming at the development of activities in a multidisciplinary perspective;
- Promoting artistic and cultural events that comprehend the culture of immigrants and the host society;
- Promoting and participating in academic, cultural and social events to publicize the project, the actions of the team and to encourage the immigrants to report their experiences, with presentation of papers and publications of articles and other academic genres.

The project team is formed by 15 members and is coordinated by the International Relations Bureau of IFG. The staff is divided into four groups:

1. Coordinator and assistant, who work at the International Relations Bureau and are also Professors of Linguistics and International Relations;
2. Professors from the Federal Institutes of Education, Science and Technology of Goiás and Goiano, who all hold Master and/or PhD degrees in Linguistics, Dance, Tourism and Hospitality, Arts, Law, International Relations and other fields;
3. Professionals from partner companies, such as psychologists, doctors, nurses, computer engineers and technicians etc.;
4. Students of the Portuguese Language and Dance degrees.

The project is structured into three phases: 1) an initial phase of training; 2) the PHL course itself; 3) lectures and workshops. Before the initial phase, the coordination took care of the administrative work such as designing and registering the project, contacting the Professors and partners, approaching the immigrants and the paper work attached to it.

In the initial phase, three students from the Portuguese Language degree and one student from the Dance degree have earned a scholarship. Other students are volunteers. All of them have received theoretical and practical training to be teachers of immigrants, the target audience of this project. Linguistics Professors work in the scope of theories and methodological approaches to language teaching, creation of teaching materials, assessment, culture(s) and diversity. The Arts Professors work with the application of the performing arts and dance in favor of the social insertion of the immigrants in Goiás / Brazilian community, via artistic-cultural themes. The professors are also the students' tutors/counselors, accompanying both the preparation and the execution of the classes, as well as the learning process of the participants and the interrelations of this process with the improvement in social, cultural and affective skills in the community.

The PHL course is taught by the students of the Portuguese Language Course, whereas artistic and cultural activities are carried out by students of the Dance degree course. There are four groups of 30 students and the classes take place at the Goiania Campus of IFG twice a week. Classes last 1 hour and 40 minutes and happen in the evenings or on Saturdays. The total length of the PHL course is 240 hours, being it split in 4 groups with 60 hours of lessons each. The classes are taught by the students, in pairs, and accompanied by the Professors.

The scholarship students and volunteers coming from the Portuguese Language course were grouped in pairs. The Dance student does not have a specific partner. She

is always forming a trio, adding her work and expertise to the pair of Portuguese students.

This procedure aims to ensure that all 4 groups experience artistic and cultural activities during the course. The option of working in pairs relies on the perspective of building a pedagogical identity of partnership, in which a student-teacher supports and is supported by another student-teacher during the pedagogical practice, following the socio-constructive premises of authors such as Vygotsky (1998) and Figueiredo (2006).

As the PHL classes advance and the participants grow more capable and confident in the use of Portuguese to interact, lectures in areas of their interest are given by professionals from partner companies. In the fields of health, law, psychology, hospitality and computer science, there are lectures for the students and lectures and workshops for the immigrants, with specific approaches for each group considering the perspective of (in)forming and performing. The focus of the workshops and lectures is mainly on issues related to personal hygiene, diseases common in Goiás, access to the Brazilian Public Health System card, vaccines; rights and duties of the immigrant, ranging from obtaining documents to themes such as slave labor; cultural conflicts, interpersonal and affective relations and qualification for the labor market in the field of hospitality. For the computer skills part, basic concepts are worked out, focusing on the use of three Microsoft applications: Word, Power Point and Excell.

### **At the moment**

The first phase of the Project has already been concluded, i.e., all the students have gone under training and the activities and materials have been planned and created. the PHL course is undergoing and we have been able to notice great interest from the participants. Two cultural activities have occurred depicting traditional a Goiás dance called “Catira” and a workshop on Brazilian traditional music and dance called “Ciranda”. All these activities, including have been registered in photographs and/or video, as well as written reports. These registers and reports will later become research data.

As for the monitoring and data registering of the activities, some instruments and strategies have been implemented:

- By the coordinator and assistant:
  - a spreadsheet of actions and goals was created so that, at each stage, there is an evaluation by the coordination of what has been achieved;
  - frequent meetings with the team are held to care for the goals and actions which were not successful;
  - a descriptive written record of the actions developed is made, with the aid of photographic and/or audio and video record of the activities.
- By the Professors:
  - an initial questionnaire was designed by the Professors and applied to the students to identify the knowledge about immigrant communities, PHL teaching and interculturality;

- a questionnaire for the participants was designed in their mother tongues (French, Creole or others) in order to obtain indications of how they live in Goias and their expectations regarding the PHL course;
  - training, classes, cultural activities, and reflective sessions have been audio and/or video recorded and photographed to analyze the progress of activities, generate data for cultural-academic events and use of this data for presentations and future publications, always respecting ethics in the collection and use of data.
- By the students:
    - the questionnaire mentioned above was answered;
    - a journal entry has been written about every class taught, to register actions, impressions, expectations, and reflections;
    - reflective sessions, through stimulated recall, have been held in orientation meetings, recorded in audio, to promote critical reflection on teaching
- By the participants:
    - an initial questionnaire was answered in their mother tongue;
    - written reports have been written on the cultural activities and also on their impressions regarding the PHL course.

The chart below summarizes the phases of the project and what has already been done in order to monitor and collect data for future research.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Actions</b>
<b>Pre-project</b>	Coordination	Administrative work: design and register, contacts, paper work
<b>Training</b>	Coordination	Spreadsheet of actions and goals; meetings; written, photographic and video record
	Professors	Questionnaires for students; orientation and tutoring; written, photographic and video record
	Students	Training; material development
<b>PHL course</b>	Coordination	Spreadsheet of actions and goals; meetings; written, photographic and video record
	Professors	Questionnaires for participants; orientation and tutoring; written, photographic and video record
	Students	Classes; journal; reflective sessions
	Participants	Questionnaire; classes activities

Figure 1: Project phases and actions.

The project has been going on for about 8 months now and is planned to last for one more semester.

### **Next steps**

The PHL course is planned to continue for about 3 more months. As the lessons advance and the participants' knowledge increases, the first workshop on civil an

immigrant rights is scheduled for the second semester, although some legal support has been provided to those who have asked for it. In the field of health, the participants have had some assistance in getting access to the public health system. The other lectures and workshops will probably take place in the following months too.

As for the monitoring and data registering of the activities, some instruments and strategies have been implemented:

- By the coordinator and assistant:
  - keep up with the spreadsheet of actions and goals;
  - continue with the team meetings;
  - keep recording data;
  - design and apply to the team members a questionnaire in the SWOT model to collect data about the good/bad aspects of the project;
  - SWOT analysis by the end of the semester;
  - Final evaluation by the end of the project.
  
- By the Professors:
  - keep up the tutoring;
  - maintain records and collect data;
  - design and apply a final questionnaire to students on their experience and impressions;
  - design a final questionnaire for the participants on their experiences and the good/bad aspects of the project;
  - answer the SWOT questionnaire;
  - participate in the midterm and final evaluation.
  
- By the partners:
  - design and conduct lectures and workshops;
  - provide the participants with assistance and advice;
  - answer the SWOT questionnaire.
  
- By the students:
  - keep up the classes and reflective sessions;
  - answer the final questionnaire designed by the Professors;
  - answer the SWOT questionnaire;
  - apply the final questionnaire to the participants.
  
- By the participants:
  - continue writing reports and participating in all the activities;
  - answer the final questionnaire.

The chart below summarizes the phases of the project and what has already been done in order to monitor and collect data for future research.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Actions</b>
<b>Lectures and workshops</b>	Coordination	Spreadsheet of actions and goals; meetings; written, photographic and video record;
	Professors	Orientation and tutoring; written, photographic and video record
	Partners	Lectures and workshops; assistance
	Students	Classes; journal; reflective sessions
	Participants	Classes activities
<b>Evaluation</b>	Coordination	SWOT questionnaire; SWOT evaluation
	Professors	Questionnaires for students and participants; SWOT questionnaire; SWOT evaluation
	Partners	SWOT questionnaire
	Students	Final questionnaire; SWOT questionnaire
	Participants	Final questionnaire

Figure 2: Future phases and actions

## **Conclusion**

Facing the gigantic refugee crisis that ravages the whole world is an urgent matter that every citizen from every country should be concerned with. It is not just a matter of placing people in a different region, but, first and most important, providing them with conditions to start over in a different culture. Migration is an activity as old as humanity. However, this may not be an excuse for a lack of interest and solidarity. Immigrants, especially refugees from poor and/or devastated communities, are human beings with all the rights to live in peace, this being not only the absence of war or misery. They also possess all the abilities to contribute to a better world and should be treated with the due respect and dignity. With this project, we intend to contribute, even if it is just a very small part, for the construction of social justice and equality.

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