THE BENEFITS OF ROLE-PLAY IN PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE CLASSES

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Abstract: This article explains and assesses the pedagogy of role-play and its implementation in Portuguese language and culture courses. While elementary and intermediate students of a second language often participate in scripted scenarios or skits provided in their textbooks—shopping, dining out, going to the doctor, etc.—role-play as defined and elaborated by Mark Carnes in Minds on Fire (2014) goes significantly beyond these. Students research and write creatively about historical or contemporary characters interacting in concrete settings and events. The result is the heightened acquisition of both language skills and new cultural knowledge. Role-play involves substantially greater engagement with course materials as well as a good deal of fun. Role-play in culture classes closely parallels the use of role-play in history courses organized around the methods of "Reacting to the Past." Role-play (as defined by Carnes) in foreign language classes is less widely used to date, but it offers important advantages when compared with and used to supplement more traditional pedagogies. This article also includes (1) sample "mini-games," drawn from the syllabi of my Portuguese language and culture courses, and (2) qualitative assessments by students evaluating their experiences with role-play.

Keywords: Role-play; Portuguese Language; Pedagogy; mini-games; culture courses

1. Introduction

In the mid 1990's Mark Carnes, a professor of History, initiated a program at Barnard College which he entitled "Reacting to the Past." The impetus behind this program arose mainly from the fact that Carnes not only sensed, but was also told by students, that college courses are generally boring, even though his classes, they added, were "less boring than most" (Carnes 19). In response, Carnes began to invest his time and energy into transforming the way traditional undergraduate history courses are taught. A new radical way of teaching emerged and spread to other universities and sister disciplines wherever professors proved willing to risk the comfort of their conventional teaching methods.

In 2014 the results of two decades of experimentation with this new pedagogy appeared in Carnes' *Minds on Fire: How Role Immersion Games Transform College.* As Carnes states, "students and teachers deserve an academic world that is as exciting as intercollegiate football, as enchanting as World of Warcraft, as subversive as illegal boozing, and as absurd as fraternity initiations" (…). Carnes' new pedagogy emphasized enjoyment in learning even while it sought to intensify levels of intellectual and emotional

engagement with content. As Colleen Flaherty (2014) elaborates, "Of course, neither the book nor Reacting is all play. In preparation for extensive debates, students read challenging historical documents and write a variety of assignments for audiences—such as 'newspaper articles' for a period reader—over several weeks. Reacting units end with a debate in which a 'winning' side is crowned." (n/p). Students confirm both working harder in Reacting courses than in other classes and having fun while doing so.

In Fall 2015 I registered for a cohort offered by the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning at my institution on the subject of role-playing. In search of ways of improving my courses, I immersed myself in reading Carnes' *Minds on Fire*. As the semester and our monthly discussions of Carnes' pedagogy progressed, I felt I had to immediately apply what I was reading. I also knew that I was not alone in my desire to make the classroom an engaging and mind-challenging environment for every student. The present article is the result of one year of experimenting with what I call "mini-games," which I have developed for both my Brazilian culture and my Portuguese language courses. The main purpose is to share some initial findings concerning students' experiences with "mini-games" and the new role-play pedagogy. I also share the content of some of the mini-games I have created, and these are accompanied by excerpts from student evaluations obtained through questionnaires and summative reflections offered in their final essays.

2. Immersion Games: Motivation and Assessment

M. D. Svinicki (2004) presents a broad framework of learning strategies within which I first would like to situate Carnes' concrete pedagogy of "role-play immersion games." Modelled and abbreviated as GAMES, Svinicki's Instructional Pathway to Self-Regulation calls for: (1) goal-oriented study, including previewing and planning; (2) active processing of content, requiring such activities as paraphrasing and creating one's own examples; (3) "memorable" studying, which entails making connections to personal experience and other course content, as well as the ability to extrapolate and to flesh out course concepts; (4) explaining content in one's own words and communicating such content successfully to others; and (5) self-monitoring, which involves the ability to scrutinize one's comprehension of materials and to make appropriate self-corrections (summarized in Lehman and Conceição 2014: 48-53) . As will become apparent, Carnes' pedagogy of "role-play immersion games" satisfies all of these criteria.

"Role-play immersion games" offer a promising solution to one of the most entrenched difficulties against which teachers of foreign languages and cultures ceaselessly struggle. This obstacle, of course, is "the discrepancy between a syllabus in which class participation is required and students [remain] unwilling to participate due to lack of motivation or anxiety about

speaking in class" (Fidalgo and von Schmidt 1995 n.p.). Playing games in the classroom has been proposed precisely as "a technique for motivating participation, promoting creativity, and testing language skills in a meaningful context" (Fidalgo and von Schmidt 1995 n.p.). For our purposes, however, it is important both to distinguish and to underscore that by "playing games" neither Carnes nor I are referring to board games in the classroom, equivalents adapted from movies or television game shows, or to stock, pre-scripted textbook dialogs consisting of role-play "snapshot" skits. Rather, from Carnes' perspective (and mine), role-play means *immersion games*: "role-play" here entails deep, contextually rich immersion in historical and/or contemporary personalities, facts, events, and experiences.

Many researchers have provided strong endorsements for the motivational and educational benefits of role-play as defined in the Carnesian sense. For example, Suchismita Bhattacharjee writes:

Commenting on the efficacy of role-play teaching, Poorman (2002) stated that "integrating experiential learning activities in the classroom increases interest in the subject matter and understanding of course content." Involving the students in the process has proven to increase their enthusiasm as claimed by Fogg (2001) who found increased student involvement in his history class which was earlier very boring and monotonous. Additionally, in this pedagogical approach students are not mere passive recipients of the instruction materials any more, but actively take part in the process of information exchange. During role-play teaching, as the students acquire knowledge through problem solving of a realistic scenario it is more likely that the students will be able to absorb the meaning and implement it in professional careers when needed (McKeachie, 2003). (Bhattacharjee 2014)

In a similar vein, Barbara Martinson and Sauman Chu assert that "games are effective tools for learning because they offer students a hypothetical environment in which [students] can explore alternative decisions without the risk of failure. Thought and action are combined into purposeful behavior to accomplish a goal. Playing games teaches us how to strategize, to consider alternatives, and to think flexibly" (Martinson and Chu 2008: 478 [qtd. in Talak-Kiryk 2010]). And, indeed, Foreman earlier had argued that "learning through performance requires active discovery, analysis, interpretation, problem-solving, memory, and physical activity and extensive cognitive processing" (Foreman 2003: 16 [qtd. in Talak-Kiryk 2010]).

From the vantage point of general pedagogical theory and criticism, a final observation about the value of role-play immersion games is worthwhile. Although not specifically discussed in the relevant literature, it is clearly the case that classroom role-play (in the Carnesian sense) provides robust opportunities for direct assessment of student performance. This is true not only in terms of the acquisition of cultural competence but also in terms of the acquisition of linguistic proficiencies. Moreover, its value accrues

not just to the full, weeks-long version of immersion games to be found in Carnes, but also to my new technique of single-week "mini-games" as well. The orally delivered written speeches; the spontaneous process of rebuttal, refutation, and; extended debate; the simultaneous tweeting and impromptu meta-commentary—all of these dimensions contribute significantly to a basis for instructor evaluation and for student self-evaluation (self-monitoring).

Carnes' role-play pedagogy has been propagated across numerous disciplines, and it has impacted not only the pedagogical strategies of professors but also the learning strategies of students. E. Kate Armstrong affirms that

Role-play is currently used in a range of disciplines including drama, education, psychology (Britt, 1995), social sciences (Duveen and Solomon, 1994), philosophy, English literature (Wolf et al., 1994), foreign languages (Ladousse, 1987), environmental science, engineering, geography (Maddrell, 1994), health sciences, business (Brown, 1994; Egri, 1999), tourism and hospitality, ethics (Brown, 1994; Raisner, 1997), economics, marketing, political science and information technology (Kirkwood and Ross, 1997). New approaches are also emerging via specially designed computer software (Wagner, 1997). (6)

Perhaps this is an opportune moment for our profession to consider a serious examination and extensive trial of "role-play immersion games," as well as role-play "mini-games," in the curricula of foreign language and culture departments.

As we now turn our attention more specifically to Carnes' understanding of role-play, a good place to start is with his observation that he found one genre of student observations to be apparently "nonsensical." According to Carnes, students reported having "understood themselves better by imagining they were someone else"; to have "learned more when teachers said less"; to have "found failure to be a pathway to success"; to have "experience[d] strong community bonds through fierce contention"; to have "embraced moral thinking when teachers stopped preaching"; to have "acquired leadership skills by becoming teammates"; and to have "understood the past better by filtering it through their own present" (Carnes 7).

By impersonating somebody else, students are naturally forced to see and to think from a different perspective: they open themselves to other ways of looking at problems and situations. Carnes subsequently explains that "when we identify with other people, whether by reading novels, watching plays, or engaging in role-immersion games, we enlarge our cognitive universe. We gain access to more information and new ideas. But something else occurs, too. We find strangers less strange. When our self contains multitudes (…) we connect more readily with others, confident that we can cope with new perspectives and ideas that may challenge our sense of who we are" (123).

Feeling rejection at being challenged in their views and discomfort at discussing sensitive subjects are common in students' approach to college life. As teachers we also seldom push students out of their comfort zone for fear that they will collapse or have a nervous breakdown. In this sense, we prefer to talk more and listen less, and so every class ends quietly and peacefully, all of us returning home with the same feeling of personal reassurance. But does anyone really gain anything from this situation? Is the feeling of comfort what we want our students to remember about their college classes? Do we want students to leave university life four or five years later untransformed by their studies? Challenging discussion is one of the main attributes of role-play and one that certainly changes the "noise level" of classes.

Carnes also points out an additional advantage of playing a game: its subversive side. There is something contradictory in the nature of games: we immerse ourselves in a subversive play that does not always involve pleasurable tasks; on the contrary, they can be quite monotonous. Nonetheless, a player performs them endlessly without noticing either the time passing by or the routine of their tasks. According to Carnes, "subversive play worlds commonly oblige players to work harder than ever before. This also explains why the activities that students customarily dread (and often evade)—going to class, reading, researching, writing papers—become 'fun' in the context of a role-immersion game" (85).

Furthermore, how many times do students find refuge in library corners or their dorm rooms, preferring the solitude of these places and refusing to work in groups? Working with others is always a challenge; nobody can deny it. According to Carnes, we need to shift our traditional pedagogical perspective from teacher to learner. In his words, "students learn how to work with others by working with others; they learn leadership by leading and by being led. Role-immersion games do just that, by thrusting students into complicated situations that oblige them to work in teams—and sometimes to lead them" (240). In this sense, role-play builds community and promotes engagement.

What might arguably qualify as the most important aspect of role-play games is the fact that they oblige "students to address messy, unstructured problems: these range from solving interpersonal dynamics within a team to devising arguments based on difficult texts and rapidly changing situations" (292). As Carnes suggests, "this requires imaginative thinking of the sort one seldom learns through passive pedagogical modes" (292).

Even though "the experience of playing a Reacting game [may seem] the antithesis of the pedagogy of higher education" (Carnes 7), *Minds on Fire* has convinced many of us that that role-play can and does succeed. Our traditional methods of teaching such as lectures and loosely structured discussions—while not completely disastrous—should continue to be used,

since they too have their advantages. Nevertheless, we also believe that these traditional methods can be radically transformed into a much more positive teaching and learning experience.

3. Brazilian Culture and History

I would like to share here three "mini" role-play games that I created for a "Brazilian Culture" course which I taught this past year. After completing the cohort where I and some colleagues had read and discussed Carnes' *Minds on Fire*, I decided to experiment with a delivery format different from the usual lecture followed by questions/discussion. Too many times students had remained passively sitting in front of me with empty sleepy eyes (and the usual quick peek at the clock) while I strained to elicit a few words out of their mouths. I was ready to implement a new pedagogical approach even if the course ended up being a complete failure. Yet I also knew from the outset that if I assigned too many games I would overtax their energies—I had kept in mind Carnes' students who had reported working harder and longer while preparing roles for these games—so I decided to create only five games and to intersperse them throughout the semester alongside lectures and other type of classroom activities.

The first game took place right at the beginning of the semester. We were studying the Portuguese "discovery" of Brazil, the early contacts with indigenous inhabitants, and the posterior process of colonization. I wanted students to understand how Portuguese views of indigenous peoples had changed from the sixteenth century; but more than that, I wanted them to have a better grasp of the causes and implications of these changes. I wanted them to read as much as possible; but in a class that meets two times a week for 75 minutes, I could not require a group of undergraduates to read every single description recorded by voyagers, priests, adventurers, philosophers, etc. I could have lectured to them: But how much would they retain from my lectures, and how boring would that be?

The "discovery," contact, and colonization thus presented a great opportunity to create a game. A topic embodying political, moral, and "exotic" dimensions, and affording a broad cast of historical characters, stood before me. And even if history did not supply enough principals actors (this depends on class size in relation to historical events), one of the strong points of role-play is that you can ask students to create their own characters and to portray certain points of view. I called this particular game "Idyllic and Cannibal Encounters Party."

The following is the description of the game which I handed out to students inside envelopes bearing their names. Inside they would also find their assigned character. The handing out of the envelopes with the game's objective and students' assigned characters creates an environment of suspense which students enjoy as they look around and ask their peers who

they were going to be. It is the initial step for enthusiasm. The game, quite simply, read as follows:

Throughout the sixteenth century voyagers to Brazil recorded their views of and perspectives on the land and its peoples. By the end of the century, King Felipe I (Felipe II of Spain) decided to give a party in Porto Seguro, a city in Bahia named for the region where the Portuguese navigators first arrived in 1500. His goal was to better understand what Brazil was all about. Felipe I had received confused and conflicted information and needed to acquire more information first-hand.

Research your character and prepare a speech on what he or she would say about the Brazilian land and the indigenous peoples. Be prepared to engage with other, differing views.

At the end of the party, you will vote on the best speech and performance. The winner will receive a Starbucks gift certificate to buy a "human flesh bagel."
You will vote on Twitter, so create your accounts.

The characters for "Idyllic and Cannibal Encounters Party" were the following: Pero Vaz de Caminha; Afonso Ribeiro; Jean de Léry; José de Anchieta; Manuel da Nóbrega; André Thevet; Hans Staden; Damião de Góis; Michel de Montaigne; João de Barros; Pero de Magalhães Gândavo; Gabriel Soares de Sousa; Theodor de Bry.

During this game students tweeted comments as their peers delivered their speeches. Initially I had worried that the use of this social media might interfere with students' attention to the speeches, but I included tweeting as an aspect of the classroom activity for this first trial. As the day and time for the game to be played in class arrived, I was surprised to see that students had already placed a picture of their character on their Twitter accounts and were already tweeting about the subject matter even before I had opened my own account.

When students began to deliver their speeches, I became amazed by the amount of information they had discovered about their characters as well as by how much knowledge they also had gleaned in the process about other characters. Comments tweeted during the speeches were focused and credible: students remained "in character" for the tweets, continuing to portray the views espoused by their characters while, at the same time, engaging and "attacking" the views and perspectives of other characters. Positive energy and attitude flowed throughout the classroom and was reflected in laughter and enjoyment. At the close of general discussion, students voted on the best speech, but they seemed unconcerned about winning or losing. They left together, talking, and expressing to me their satisfaction with the session. A sense of community had started to form.

Another game we played in class during the semester was called "Getúlio

Vargas to Power!!" The objective read as follows:
We are in the period of 1937-45 which is known in Brazil as the Estado Novo [New State]. Getúlio Vargas, the dictator, pursues several measures to justify his power and dictatorship in Brazil. In this game the future of Brazil as a democracy is at stake, and you will have to be fearless in your arguments either for or against the continuation of the Estado Novo in Brazil and of Getúlio Vargas as head of the nation. You will write speeches according to your characters' views, and you will have to convince Getúlio Vargas either to step down or to continue running the country. Don't forget that we are in the midst of World War II, so you should also include comments on the role and participation of Brazil in the war.

In this game, I wanted students not only to comprehend Getúlio Vargas' dictatorship, but to recognize Brazil in a larger context, namely, that of the World War II. Contrary to the previous game described, I provided students with more information on what I wanted them to do with their characters and which position they were taking. I will offer just a few examples here of the characters that were involved and their description in this game.

Role: Getúlio Vargas

You are Getúlio Vargas. Write a speech introducing yourself and what your plans are for the future of Brazil. After listening to several different views, you will have to take sides with one of these views and explain your reasons. The view you choose will determine the future of Brazil. You are either going to decide to step down or to continue in power.

Role: Oliveira Vianna

You are Oliveira Vianna, a lawyer from the state of Rio de Janeiro. Write a speech introducing yourself and your political views. You are for Getúlio Vargas and the Estado Novo.

Role: Plínio Salgado

You are Plínio Salgado, an Integralist and Paulista writer. Write a speech introducing yourself and your political views. You are against Getúlio Vargas and the Estado Novo.

Role: President Franklin Roosevelt

You are President Roosevelt. Write a speech introducing yourself, your political views and your reasons for allying yourself with Getúlio Vargas and his dictatorship.

Role: Brazilian Citizen

You are a Brazilian Citizen. Create your own character. Write a speech introducing yourself, your political views and the effects of the Vargas dictatorship on your daily life. You are an anti-Vargista!

Once again, students tweeted during the speeches, identifying themselves through their character's picture and commenting on the content of the speech being delivered. The student playing Getúlio Vargas listened

attentively and took notes. After the delivery, I broke the classroom into two groups according to their pro- or anti-Vargas views. This was the opportunity for students to make their arguments stronger as a group and their last opportunity to convince Vargas, as well as their opposition colleagues, of their opinions. Their minds and hearts were in fact "on fire," so much so that the volume of their voices permeated the building. Of course there came the predictable knock on the classroom door. The message conveyed was that my students were too excited and needed to calm down so that people downstairs could do whatever they were doing. My students were puzzled: weren't they supposed to talk like this in every class? Had they done anything wrong? No, of course they hadn't, I told them. People are just not used to classes like this.

To close debate, students from each group constructed summarizing arguments and produced another speech on the spot, this time addressing all of the parties involved. The student performing Vargas then had to make a decision based on what "he" had heard. Once again, it was really not that important who won or who lost. I noticed that students always want to win, but in the end any sense of failure disappears into—or is rendered not so relevant—by the feelings of engagement and community. On this day the students stayed in class 15 minutes past the end of the period, talking among each other and seeming neither to notice nor to care that we had gone overtime.

The third game I would like to share here was the last one of the semester. After an intellectual voyage across the centuries in Brazil, students looked forward with excitement to this last game, in particular because it involved recent events they could readily recognize and to which they could easily relate. In addition, students would play characters who are still living—some of whom remain embroiled in political controversy. The game bore a simple title: "Brazil's World Cup." In this game the objective read as follows: *"Another week, another storm of tear gas and rubber bullets at a World Cup host city in Brazil. This time, the clashes were in the capital, Brasília, where 15,000 protesters from the Landless Workers Movement marched from the Mané Garrincha football stadium to the Palácio do Planalto state office of the president, Dilma Rousseff," Jonathan Watts reported on February 15, 2014. (http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/16/brazil-world-cup-disaster-delays-protests-deaths)*

Dave Zirin in his book **Brazil's Dance with the Devil** *states that: "They certainly didn't consider that maybe, just maybe, Brazilians don't want to spend billions on new stadiums while the poor are being displaced—especially when it's all for the benefit and service of the twenty-fist-century version of the same European powers that have been stripping the country of its skin for four hundred years" (85).*

In this game you are going to enact the events that surrounded the hosting of the World

Cup in Brazil. Some of you will be pro- World Cup and others against. Much is at stake, and you believe that you can actually change the course of history. The main objective of the game is to convince Dilma Rousseff either to cancel the world soccer event in the country or to continue with the original plans. The ones who are able to convince her will win the game.

Here again I wanted students to understand the bigger picture behind holding a world cup, not only in Brazil, but in general. The characters were: Dilma Rouseff; Lula da Silva; FIFA's president, Sepp Blatter; Fifa's vice president, Alfredo Hawit; a member of the environmental community; a member of the Landless Workers Movement; Carlos Tukano, member of the Brazilian Indigenous Cultural Center; Marta Vieira da Silva, woman soccer player; Pelé; an inhabitant of Vila Autódromo; a Brazilian citizen of the elite; a Brazilian middle-class university student.

Some of the characters in this game were generic, representing "ordinary" or "common people," and for whom students had to contrive their own story. Some students prefer this type of character because, even though students remain to an extent constrained by historical period, geography, and actual or plausible events, they can exercise a substantial degree of creative freedom and imagination. Obviously, in the games described in this essay, students often struggled with their characters because they had to defend an opinion that may have been dramatically opposed to their own. They would scream sometimes: "This is so hard!" But when the day of the game rolled around, I was always happily surprised to see how they had accepted the challenge and had committed themselves within the world of the game to their character's point of view.

As the game of "Brazil's World Cup" was about to start, I received one last surprise. One of the students—a major in journalism—had checked out a camera and filmed the entire role-play so that they, and I, could preserve our memories of the class. Our class, of course, was interrupted yet again by a knock on the door and a request to keep the volume down. This time the students just laughed.

4. Portuguese Language

Many of us who teach Portuguese language courses across the United States have adopted *Ponto de Encontro* as a sort of Bible for our classes. In my view, *Ponto de Encontro* remains the best language textbook for Portuguese. Nevertheless, I can hardly ever stick with a textbook from the first to the last page. I always try to create a few different exercises of my own, since I want to provide students with additional and varied kinds of learning experiences.

After implementing Carnes' role-play pedagogy in my culture courses, I decided to dive into more unknown waters and to see what could happen if I introduced role-play into my Elementary Portuguese Language and Civilization II. Naturally, students always role-play a bit in language classes,

as for example, during the simulation of a dinner at a restaurant or the customary visit to the shopping mall. But the kind of role-play I intended to introduce—modelled as it was on Carnes generally and the mini-game format I had devised for "Brazilian Culture"—was going to be different. It was also scary in view of the fact that, with role-play pedagogy, the conduct of many class sessions and the success of most activities depend on students' willingness to assume significant responsibility for their own learning. My experiment could go one of two ways: failure or success. I decided not to think much about the outcome and just to concentrate on the ride (maybe not a very pedagogical approach, some would argue).

I began by creating a list of famous people from the countries where Portuguese is spoken. I had 15 students in this second semester elementary-level class, and so I chose the following 15 "characters": Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa; Dilma Rousseff; Cristiano Ronaldo; Caetano Veloso; Jorge Palma; António Lobo Antunes; Ivete Sangalo; Ademiro Alves de Sousa; Xuxa; Lili Caneças; Paula Rego; Isabel dos Santos; Graça Machel; Gisele Bündchen; Walter Salles. I intended to have not just a variety of countries, but also of personalities and professions. On the first day of class, I assigned each student one of the characters and told them that they were going to be that person for the entire semester. Some were excited; others not so much, since they would have to assume a different gender from their own: "How come I am a man and yet you want me to *be a woman? And a supermodel at that!*" That was precisely the point, I thought.

Before I discuss the results of the role-play experience in my Portuguese language class, I would like to share some of the games I created based on *Ponto de Encontro's* chapters.

Chapter 8 of *Ponto de Encontro* focuses on cultural traditions. Thus our game was based on the celebration of Carnival. I gave students the following description and objective and assigned them their position in regards to Carnival. The game was entitled "Carnaval em perigo" ("Carnival in danger"): *The president of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, and the president of Portugal, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, have decided that they are going to stop the tradition of Carnival. They argue that this holiday takes too much time from people's work and lives, etc. One group is going to try to convince Rouseff and Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa that stopping Carnival is not a good idea, and the other group is going to try to convince them to hold fast to their decision. Each person of each group will write a speech focusing on the importance of culture in general and carnival in particular in both Brazil and Portugal. Members of the other team will write a speech devaluing the importance of the country's culture and focusing on other more important aspects for the development of Brazil and Portugal. The team that convinces President Dilma and President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa will win the game.*

When students began delivering their speeches in Portuguese, I was genuinely astonished. Even though their speeches contained obvious grammar mistakes, I immediately saw that something vital was happening.

Students clearly had consulted the dictionary, since they were applying vocabulary beyond what their book offers. Perhaps more importantly, they were not restricting themselves to verb tenses that pertained to the unit under study. Traditionally verb tenses are taught in a progression, and students spend some period of time practicing just that specific tense; then they add on new tenses as they move along. Of course, when we speak naturally about a certain topic, it is difficult to employ just one or a couple tenses. What role-play does is to oblige students to search for and locate the tense they need in order to express themselves. They might not conjugate the verb perfectly right away, but they are making the effort in the target language. In other words, students are not waiting for the instructor to come to class and teach them. They are taking the learning and the research into their own hands.

Debates also figured prominently in the role-play activities designed for my Portuguese language course. Even though these students had engaged in only one prior semester of Portuguese study, they were putting forth their best efforts to argue and to debate seriously on a topic using only the target language. I could perceive that sometimes it was really difficult (remember, too, that some students had been assigned the task of presenting arguments against what might have been their personal views), but they were persevering and enjoying themselves in the process. At the end of the class, students expressed their content with the results, no matter whether they had won or lost the game. One of the top students in the course told me that, despite all of her best efforts, she had lost all of the games. I could sense a bit of frustration—she is an excellent student not used to losing— but she stated nonetheless that she was happy to have learned so much.

In chapter 10, we played a game pitting traditional food against fast food: "Diga NÃO ao McDonalds! A comida tradicional versus a comida rápida" ("Say NO to McDonalds! Traditional Food versus Fast Food"). The objective read:

Lili Caneças started a campaign in Lisbon against the invasion of fast-food in the country, especially the McDonald's chain. She states that "this type of food is ruining the Portuguese traditional and healthy diet and making her jet-set friends fat." Lili and her supporters are going to write speeches against fast-food. The opposition group will need to convince them otherwise. The president of Portugal is undecided about what to do. Both groups need to convince him of their perspective. The group that can convince him will win.

In lesson 12 the game was about "Uma viagem de sonho" ("A DreamVacation") and the students were given the following objective:

Since you are a famous person, you have been working hard and you have not taken a vacation in a long time. You came to a point in your life that you want to reverse that situation and travel as much as possible. But you want to have a dream vacation. You don't like to travel alone, so your dream vacation includes being surrounded by as many people as possible. In any case, you will be happy and satisfied if you can convince Graça

Machel to go with you. Write an ad that you would post for a dream vacation. The person who gets Graça Machel interested in traveling with him/her will win the game. In the case of Graça, she also has her own ideas about a dream vacation, but she is undecided.

Lesson 13, and the last game I will share, concerned the Brazilian Amazon. I gave it the title, "Salvem a Amazónia!" ("Save the Amazon!") The objective was this:
President Dilma does not want to stop the deforestation of Amazónia. Once again the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries needs to interfere in a controversial subject. One group will write speeches defending Dilma's position, the other against her. The group that convinces her wins the game.

In total, students in Elementary Portuguese Language and Civilization II played eight games during the semester, which is equivalent to half of their class time. They worked harder than students in any of my past courses at the same language level. During their presentations and debates, I was mainly an auditor. I sat and listened to them as they took over the class. I would take notes of the most common mistakes they were making when speaking. We would then go over these mistakes and, progressively, they started correcting themselves once a mistake occurred again. Class flowed from their own examples, not from the book or my own creations.

In the same manner as in the Brazilian Culture class, I also included Twitter in my second-semester elementary Portuguese language course, precisely for the purpose of facilitating students' real-time engagement with other students' speeches. The ability to use Twitter required me only to assign a hashtag to each course; then the students could set up their own individual accounts. A number of studies exist reporting on the efficacy of using social media like Twitter as a tool in the classroom. According to Krishna Bista,

Although there are clear debates between the educational rhetoric and the use of social spaces (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn), the careful and creative use of such social media can strengthen the educational interest and academic success of students (Bista, 2014; McArthur & Bostedo-Conway, 2012). Twitter is rich in engaging students and teachers, and educators across the disciplines (Morgan, 2014). (98)

In her most recent publication on the use of Twitter, Bista undertook a case study based on the perceptions of graduate students in education disciplines. Participants shared their experience of using Twitter as a required tool throughout a semester. Bista concluded that,

Twitter may be used differently in online teaching than in a traditional classroom setting. Some important elements such as the background of students (e.g., age, number of students), nature of the classroom setting, nature of course information and technological knowledge of students may be worth consideration while implementing Twitter in the classroom. It

is hard to determine the facts about whether Twitter helps students build intellectual growth when used in the classroom or to develop a brand for marketing and other purposes. There are no definite answers about whether Twitter has been creating more social and educational opportunities for scholarly practice (Bista, 2014). However, Twitter is one of the emerging online spaces for social and educational participation and it needs future inquiry for other possibilities (99).

In my Portuguese class, students reported having fun while tweeting, even though it required a lot of attention on their part to fully process their colleagues' speeches in a language that they had just recently started to learn and to tweet in that same language at the same time. I expected this reaction from the beginning, so I told them that this part of the game was low stakes; thus they should relax and not think about the grade. Nonetheless, students often laughed along with the posts, and I was impressed with the speed with which they were able to post. As well as with the Brazilian Culture class, students used pictures of their characters. This was exciting for them, since they were always expecting to be confused with the real person out there in cyberworld and that one day that person would contact them to ask why were they "stealing his/her identity." And they would proudly reply, "I am you in my Portuguese class!"

At the end of the semester, students importantly reported being still energized for language study and satisfied with their classroom experience. Based on their rising test scores, the pace and evolution of the quality of their short compositions, and their progress in speaking proficiency, I can confidently state that the introduction of role-play into this most recent version of Elementary Portuguese Language and Civilization II catalyzed student performance at qualitatively higher levels of proficiency when compared to earlier classes of mine in which role-play (in the Carnesian sense) was lacking. I was amazed and gratified by how the students had progressed by allowing themselves to become immersed in what they saw at the beginning of the semester as "the teacher's craziness." Role-play in language classes definitely forces students to take learning into their own hands and to not be so dependent on the structure provided by the professor or the book. It motivates them to work harder to improve their language skills, and it creates a space in which they can acquire greater cultural competence and grow as individuals.

All of the benefits emphasized by Mark Carnes of using role-play in courses—elevated self-esteem, empathy, increased rhetorical skills, harder work while having fun, thinking outside of the box by allowing oneself to be a different person, imaginative power—came alive in both my culture and language courses.

As a conclusion, I would like to offer some quotations from my students (they gave me their permission) recorded in their reflective papers and exit

questionnaire at the end of the semester:

I think that this is a great way to learn and teach a new language to students. The discussions and speeches force one to think about the language outside the realm of just what is taught in the text book and in class. During the argument phase of the game it forces you to think in Portuguese in order to construct a meaningful argument. Also the constant speaking in front of the class builds confidence in yourself with this new language. It also forces you to try and be better at the language so that you don't make a fool of yourself in front of the class. I enjoyed the speeches and I thought that I learned more of the language via this method.

After participating in the role-plays, I have definitely seen a transformation in me, for I feel more confident while speaking Portuguese in front of my colleagues and professor. The role-plays encouraged me to enrich my vocabulary in Portuguese and also challenged me to improve my writing skills in Portuguese. In each role-play, I was able to observe significant improvement in my writing and vocabulary. Without a doubt, role-play allows students to learn the Portuguese language at a faster pace, while learning more about the Portuguese and Brazilian culture through their individual characters.

After "being" my characters I feel that I have become more open-minded. I can understand why it is so hard for people to agree. Sometimes, while defending beliefs that were assigned to me (and often not consistent with my own), I became so focused on being right that I only listened to the other side so I could respond. I was passionately defending deforestation, when I won an essay contest in 5th grade for a speech on the destruction of the Amazon. That made me realize that part of our problem is that we only listen to argue, we rarely try to hear one another out to understand their point of view.

In the end I feel that both classes benefited from these exercises. In Portuguese I was able to practice speaking, use more complex grammar, and learn from the mistakes I make. In Brazilian Culture, it made historical events more concrete and tangible for me. I've always struggled with dates, and acts, and policies, but this brought them to life and enabled the topics we studied to resonate with me. I was worried, in Portuguese, that I wouldn't be a good speaker, however I feel that this class was a very safe environment for me to learn and make mistakes in.

I also loved the Twitter component. I don't normally use Twitter, but this was so fun! In both classes it helped me remember things about certain views/topics, and made it more fun as we go to approach serious issues in a more casual way that was relatable to us.

In the end, I had a great time pretending this semester! I remember being so nervous at the beginning, but by the last role-plays I felt comfortable, and I had learned a lot. Compared with lecture where there is less interaction, or tedious, drawn out projects that are supposed to be engaging, this was amazing. We got to "teach" the class by relating our opinions, and then we got to defend them. You had to prepare, but in the end you also had to be able to roll with the punches. Also, we got to relate to one another as classmates in a more interesting way. I have never spoken to anyone in my Quantitative Business Tools class; I just go for the lecture. These exercises allowed us to relate to one another. Whenever I tell my roommates or friends about these classes, they get jealous of how much fun I get to have while I learn. It's kind of sad that the rest of the university doesn't focus on letting learning be fun, because it really should be.

At the start of the 2015 fall semester I had a rather intense anxiety about public speaking, but after "being" so many different characters, and doing so many of these role-play activities in an environment that was welcoming, accepting and fun, I am glad to say that my anxiety has been greatly reduced.

These games put me in some tough shoes. I had to fight for ideals that I did not share and that was a hard thing to do. At the same time, arguing from a different point of view gave me a better understanding of why things happened the way they did. (…) I'm definitely better at it now than I was a semester ago and therefore I am transformed for life. (…) I will never get tired of saying this, we get a complete immersion in the culture, history and issues by doing these role-plays. Reading alone will never have the same impact. These roles give us sort of a hands on experience with what was going on and how people felt or how they still feel about the issue. And as I said before it makes learning fun.

I've rekindled my love for history which I used to hate since entering high school. The kind of motivation that you see in this class it's not just because we're awesome individuals eager to learn it's because we are motivated to learn. And that kind of motivation is what we all should have. I wish all my professors had a similar teaching method to the one you brought to this university because it would make a positive impact on the class. I will miss it and thank you for making learning history a fun and exciting topic again.

Even though I don't judge a book by its cover, I had my prejudices about this assignment and especially my character; at first I thought all models were the same, just superficial with no real knowledge, and was I wrong when I started to research my character. Secondly always to keep an open mind about things, never thought that this assignment that I rejected the thought of when I first found out about them would become something fun, and something that I would look forward to in order to break the monotony.

Finally, I would like to say that I recommend this kind of learning for

any subject and any matter in which it could be incorporated. If it is done properly with research and conscience, it can lead to a whole new form to see things from someone else's perspective and to understand their points of view along with their culture. If I do (even though I do not think it would be the case) follow to some point the footsteps from many members in my family and teach, I would incorporate this kind of learning tool into my classes.

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