Literature and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC): Promoting ICC Through a Content-Based Approach To "My Son The Fanatic" (H. Kureishi)

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Abstract | Literary texts have an increasingly prominent role in EFL (English as Foreign Language) classes. Accordingly, more academic studies about the role of literature in foreign language learning have been published in the past decade. Nevertheless, how literature can promote the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has not been sufficiently explored. The research question in this study was: How can teaching literary texts in the EFL classroom promote ICC? The study was carried out in a 12th-year class in which the students studied the short story "My Son the Fanatic" by Hanif Kureishi (1997). I argue that a content-based approach that promotes the development of the students' affective and cognitive dimensions during reading may develop ICC. This required the adoption of a reading model comprised of two stages, the first of which is affective and spontaneous, while the second is reflexive, requiring supporting viewpoints with evidence and discussing, as well as comparing them with one's peers, which is one of the tenets of constructivism and, therefore, a content-based approach. The transformation of attitudes and beliefs, which in turn causes changes in more spontaneous reading happens in a third space, which is hybrid because it does not correspond fully to the students' culture nor to those represented in the text. By adopting this approach, the students were able to reflect on their own culture, become aware of how their beliefs, behaviours and identities condition their interpretation of the short story and, as a result, develop several domains of ICC.

Keywords | Literary text, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Third space, Content-based approach

1 INTRODUCTION

Studying literary texts in foreign language classes in Portuguese state schools has been a requirement for several decades, especially in the 3rd cycle and secondary education. In the past decade several studies about approaches to literary texts have been carried out in Portuguese classrooms, notably Querido (2012), Ferreira (2014) and Lopes (2016). Nevertheless, I believe that there are few that conveniently explore how reading and analysing literary texts may foster the development of ICC. In this article, I intend to show how students are able to develop ICC through a content-based approach to a literary text. To achieve this purpose, I start by outlining some of the advantages of studying literary texts in EFL classrooms, defining and exploring the dimensions of Byram's (1997) model of ICC and explaining how the approach carried out in this study contributes to promoting intercultural knowledge, attitudes, skills and awareness. Then I explain the basic tenets of the teaching methodology that was used in this study, and describe the research methodology. Afterwards, I provide a synopsis of the short story, and finally I explain the activities that were carried out and discuss the findings.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Culture and ICC

Since this article is concerned with the promotion of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) through literary texts, it is necessary to start by defining and discussing *culture*. This concept is wide-ranging and fairly complex. In addition, it has evolved semantically throughout time.

The several dimensions of *culture* were explored by Weaver (as cited in Hanley, 1999), who used the iceberg metaphor to divide culture into two components. The first contains elements which are visible and easy to identify. For instance, monuments, celebrities and football matches. The second comprises nine-tenths of a culture and is hidden from view. It is called "deep culture" (p. 2). It includes beliefs, values and approaches to interpersonal relationships, among others.

As "Western" societies have become increasingly multicultural, foreign language teaching should aim to develop learners' intercultural/ mediating skills because it confronts them with experiences of otherness. The ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultures as well as to establish and maintain relationships between them is called intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which entails the development of one's language and cultural competences (Gómez, 2012). To achieve this goal, Byram (1997) proposed a model of ICC for educational settings, suggesting that the goal of ICC is to promote relationships between people of different languages and/or cultures under a mutual basis of respect and understanding, which "depends on the ability to decentre and take up the perspective of the listener or reader" (p. 3). Nevertheless, in this process, the learners are aware of their identities and those of the interlocutors (Byram et al., 2003) because each person is a complex being with multiple identities and social roles. Therefore, in order to become an intercultural speaker, one needs to avoid stereotyping an individual based solely on their country of origin or ancestry. In order to establish communication between people with other social identities from one's own, one needs knowledge of social groups, the ability to decentre from one's own culture and skills to deal with people.

According to Byram's (1997) model of ICC, there are five dimensions to be developed to become intercultural. Those mainly promoted through an approach using literary texts are (a) knowledge of social groups (*savoirs*), (b) intercultural attitudes (*savoir être*), (c) skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) and (d) critical cultural awareness/ political education (*savoir s'engager*). The first dimension consists of having theoretical knowledge of historical relationships between one's own and the target culture, knowledge about the values, beliefs and behaviours of several social groups, the significance of cultural products of several cultures (for instance, songs, films, and books), as well as social distinctions in one's own and the interlocutor's culture, taking into account that these distinctions may be made according to social class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and religion, among others. This could be applied to the study of literature in the EFL classroom through

the analysis of the character's beliefs, values and behaviours, as well as the manner in which they enforce their views upon other characters.

The second dimension involves re-examining and changing one's attitudes towards people who are perceived as culturally different to us in terms of beliefs and behaviour, among other cultural traits. This change requires adopting attitudes of curiosity and openness, as well as suspending distrust and judgement regarding other peoples' culture. It also entails suspending belief in one's own beliefs, values and behaviours and trying to analyse them from the point of view of our interlocutor (Byram, 1997). This ability to decentre will avoid biased interpretations of the actions of others, including characters in literary texts.

The third dimension entails an ability to interpret a document or event from another culture and to associate it to documents and events from one's own. For instance, explaining the origins of a text and placing it in its historical/ social context and identifying ethnocentric perspectives between characters. In addition, it comprises identifying misunderstandings between characters whose identities differ significantly from one another, as well as mediating between conflicts, in other words, attempting to solve conflicts between characters. In the classroom, this could be achieved through roleplaying, or other writing activities, reflection and discussion.

The fourth dimension is the ability to assess and compare critically and, on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products from other cultures with one's own. The explicit criteria through which the phenomena are interpreted not only draw upon the various social identities the individual possesses, but also upon human rights conventions. Being intercultural does not imply agreeing with or necessarily understanding cultural practices and beliefs that go against human rights and human integrity. Being intercultural entails a dialogue and does not subscribe to cultural relativism.

2.2. Literary texts and the development of ICC

The role of authentic literary texts in the EFL classroom has not been significant in elementary or intermediate levels. There is a common assumption among EFL teachers that authentic literary texts are too complex to be studied by foreign learners (Fuentes, 2015; Gómez, 2012). Unlike informative texts where the language used has mainly literal meanings, literary texts explore language use in rich ways. The complexity of language use, redundancy and ambiguity develop not only the students' ability to interpret a text, but also their imagination (Matos, 2012).

In addition, the literary text is a privileged means to enable familiarization with the target cultures of the language which is being studied. According to Fuentes (2015):

> with the literary text students practice the language while getting closer to its culture. Literature facilitates the acquisition of knowledge about the traditions, customs and ways of life of the target language that the student is learning (my translation) (p. 158).

Most literary texts are capable of developing students' ICC as long as the approach or reading model engages with the students' affective and cognitive domains, and prompts them to reflect about their own culture, as well as the foreign culture, which is represented. Nevertheless, there are a few criteria teachers should take into account when they choose literary texts. First and foremost, it is easier to promote ICC with literature that represents intercultural encounters or multicultural literature (Gómez, 2012). Furthermore, the length of the text, the students' language proficiency level, as well as the students' interests are important factors to bear in mind before choosing a text. I would like to underscore that the text needs to be meaningful to the students so they may discuss their reading experiences and genuine reactions with their colleagues (Querido, 2012).

Both intercultural encounters and the process of literary interpretation take place in a third space, which is hybrid, reflexive and transformative. It is also liminal and, therefore, lies between two cultures: the unknown, which is represented in the text, and the reader's: "It does not correspond with any of the two original spaces (the readers' familiar/ foreign culture); these remaining, however, within sight thus allowing for comparisons" (Matos, 2012, p. 22). This place avoids the dichotomy

between "self" and "other" (Holquist, 2002) and fosters openness to cultural difference, decentring and meaning negotiation.

The third space propels the transformation of one's attitudes and beliefs regarding those who are culturally different (Matos, 2012). The literary text is capable of transporting the reader into another world and, at the same time, promoting self-awareness, if students reflect on their interpretations because they draw upon their personal experiences, values and beliefs. Delving into the world depicted in the text, interpreting it individually and, subsequently, negotiating meanings in small groups implies attitudes of decentring about the "self" and "the other". At an early stage, this may cause some culture-shock or discomfort, which, in turn, is one of the early phases of both the intercultural and the text interpretation processes.

The process of meaning-construction is active, both affectively and cognitively. As readers interpret what they read, they confront their horizon of expectation (which is comprised of their prior knowledge and experience of the world and of reading, as well as by their assumptions of the way the plot will unfold) with new textual information. This new information causes the reader to redefine his/ her horizon of expectations. This process, which allows the reader to discover new textual perspectives, is called the wandering viewpoint by Iser (as cited in Holub, 1984).

The reading model that I have adopted draws upon Matos (2012). It is also based on reader-response, according to which readers play a preponderant role in the process of giving meaning to a text (Iser, as cited in Holub, 1984), and some of the tenets of constructivism (Nola & Irzik, 2005), which advocates that schools should recognize students' prior knowledge of the world in their learning processes in class. Furthermore, it defends that knowledge should be constructed cooperatively and that students ought to take an active role in knowledge acquisition .

This reading model is comprised of two stages. The first one is more spontaneous and affective, while the second one is more cognitive and reflexive. The first entails aesthetic reading. At this stage, students become familiar with the text and a dialogue occurs between it and the reader. Even though their interpretations need to draw upon textual evidence, students should respond genuinely and affectively

to the text. The horizon of expectation and the wandering viewpoint play an important role as the reader interprets what he/she reads. If the text is short, this stage can be carried out in a classroom. Otherwise, it should be done at home, with students writing their first impressions in a portfolio or reading journal. Byram's (1997) skills of interpreting and relating help students transition from the first to the second stage by promoting a more intercultural reading of literary texts. For instance, recognising ethnocentric perspectives and discrimination in text, as well as comparing it with similar texts of one's own culture.

The second stage is particularly reflexive. At this point students work in teams and compare their initial interpretations with those of their peers. This presupposes negotiating meanings/ interpretations and defending a particular viewpoint with textual evidence. This process might broaden students' perspectives as they become aware that other readings are also cogent. The critical cultural awareness dimension plays an important role here since students reflect about their own and each other's readings, identify implicit or explicit values in the text and become aware of how their identities may influence their interpretation.

Gómez (2012) carried out a study which aimed to determine the way in which EFL learners could develop ICC through the study of literary texts and which teaching approaches would be more effective to achieve this goal. Twenty-three Colombian advanced EFL students participated in this study, all of whom were university students aged 18 to 22. In this study, five multicultural short stories were discussed by the students. In addition, four constructivist approaches were used, among which the content-based approach. This approach was used to analyse two short stories – "The First Seven Years", by Bernard Malamud, and "A Worn Path", by Eudora Welty. Regarding the former short story, Gómez (2012) concluded that the students were able to identify beliefs, traditions and values, as well as discuss the difficulties related with immigrating to the United States and the differences of cultural traditions between Jewish culture and American mainstream culture. All of these abilities entail the use of intercultural knowledge, although there was no reference in this instance to students' ability to reflect on their own beliefs, traditions and values, which is also a requirement for the development of ICC. Regarding the

latter, the students proposed topics for discussion arguably related with the plot such as dementia and racism. They also enriched their analyses by doing autonomous research on the latter topic and relating historical knowledge to the plot, reflecting on the negative impact of racial discrimination. One interviewed student said that discussions on racism in the U.S. prompted her and several classmates to reflect on their own behaviour and avoid displaying racist attitudes. This shows that these students acquired intercultural attitudes.

In short, the analysis of a literary text can promote the development of various dimensions of ICC since the act of reading takes place in a hybrid third space in which the reader gradually develops intercultural attitudes of openness, suspension of disbelief about the culture represented in the text and reflects about the way his/ her own prejudices, perspectives, behaviours and beliefs may affect his/ her interpretation.

2.3. A content-based approach

The approach to teaching adopted was content-based learning (Stryker & Leaver, 1997). This approach is constructivist since it advocates that teaching should take into account the students' experiences and background knowledge. It also suggests that the learning experiences which are more significant are those in which the student interacts with peers and the teacher. Therefore, if we apply this approach to the study of literature, the student should be engaged in a process of meaning negotiation with peers. According to this approach, materials should be organized around content or themes. In addition, language is considered as a means of communicating, therefore the emphasis is on discussion of topics instead of the study of grammar.

According to Stryker & Leaver (1997), this approach has "the potential to enhance students' motivation, to accelerate students' acquisition of language proficiency, to broaden cross-cultural knowledge, and to make the language learning experience more enjoyable and fulfilling" (p. 5). Furthermore, it advocates the use of authentic texts, even with students at an elementary level, and suggests that the

activities rather than the text should be graded. Texts may also be abridged or slightly edited.

2.4 "My Son the Fanatic" – synopsis

This short story was published in 1997. Its main characters are Parvez, an atheist Pakistani immigrant in England and Ali, his British-born son. The plot of the short story centres around Ali's process of religious radicalisation and especially the manner in which his father deals with his son's changing beliefs and attitudes. Parvez realises his son's change of behaviour when his room starts to get tidier and he throws away several belongings such as clothes, games and sports' equipment. Besides, he becomes estranged from his friends. This sudden change of behaviour causes Parvez to suspect that his son is a drug addict. One day he invites Ali to go out for dinner. Through his son's looks of disgust at his drinking, his reproaches on other habits of his father's such as eating pork or gambling, as well as his loathing for Western civilization, he realises that his son has become an Islamist. What is most distressing is the fact that Ali wants "Sharia law" enforced in every country, which would be achieved throughout violent *jihad*.

As Parvez is a taxi driver who works mainly by night, he talks with one of his favourite clients, a prostitute named Bettina. She advises him to explain to his son his philosophy of life as Ali believes that most people in the West lack a purpose in life. Parvez tries to convince Ali of the importance of profiting from life on Earth without harming other people. This attempt is useless as Ali considers enjoyment a bottomless pit and he also thinks that his people are oppressed throughout the world. Despite his failure to persuade his son to become more moderate, one day, while driving Bettina somewhere, he notices his son walking on the street and Bettina convinces him to pull over in order to give him a ride home. Bettina's efforts to reach out to Ali are unsuccessful. The conversation gets so tense that she leaves the car, aggravating Parvez's anger at his son. When they get home, Parvez gets drunk and, realising that he has lost his son forever, beats him up. His son doesn't

retaliate but seems fearless and calm, replying to his father "So who's the fanatic now?".

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out during the author's internship as an English and Spanish trainee teacher at a Secondary School in the outskirts of Lisbon during the 2017/2018 school year. The 20 Portuguese participants in this study were enrolled in a 12th-year English class and were aged 16 to 18. Since there were no official Ministry of Education documents at the time that explicitly stated the reference level for foreign languages in years 10, 11 and 12, the department of foreign languages in that school adopted B2 level (Council of Europe, 2001) for 12th-year English.

The research methodology that guided this study was action research. Action research takes place in a particular societal context (Burns, 2009). Regarding foreign language teaching, that context lies in schools or classrooms. Its main goal is to adapt teaching methods, approaches and practices to each environment, so it may improve learning outcomes and foster professional development. Each practitioner needs to be reflective about his/ her own practices to achieve these goals.

Action research involves undertaking an intervention with several steps. Firstly, classroom practitioners have to identify clearly what the problems or issues that need to be tackled in the learning environment are. Secondly, they need to formulate a hypothetical solution. Thirdly, they need to plan intervention and implement it. Fourthly, they need to carefully observe the outcomes and draw conclusions (Burns, 2009; Nunan, 2006). If there are shortcomings, practitioners need to undertake other cycles.

There are several tools to record and reflect on one's teaching practices. These include learning journals, student feedback and audio recordings of classes. In this study the research tools employed were a learning journal, a group interview and

student written feedback, which came from their written answers to the activities on "My Son the Fanatic" (Appendix A).

"My Son the Fanatic" was chosen because although it was published in the 1990s, the plot was still relevant when this study was carried out. As a result of a series of terrorist attacks perpetrated by sympathizers/ members of the Islamic State in European countries, there has been much debate about Islamic fundamentalism and the integration of migrants. Nevertheless, the fanaticized son of the protagonist of this short story was born in Britain, raised by parents who adopted a Western lifestyle and was fully integrated into society up until his religious radicalization. This is at odds with most people's concepts of an Islamist. This text is interesting and has the potential of developing students' intercultural knowledge, attitudes and skills.

The students read the story for the first time during one of the last classes of the first term and were asked to state what they thought the theme of the short story was. The students completed the other activities (Appendix A) in three ninety-minute classes. Their main goals were (1) developing students' intercultural knowledge on Islam, (2) fostering reflection on their own and their peers impressions of the story, (3) relating the plot of the short story with the students' prior knowledge of reality and (4) developing the students' intercultural attitudes and skills.

After each class, I reflected on their answers and tried to relate them with the purposes of ICC. I recorded the most relevant reflections in a learning journal. Moreover, as I wanted to analyse the students' knowledge, attitudes and skills regarding intercultural dialogue more thoroughly, I selected five students from the class for a scripted group interview, which was carried out a few weeks after the lessons on "My Son the Fanatic" had concluded. The primary selection criterion was the diversity of their reactions to the intercultural conflict depicted throughout the short story. While some mainly blamed the son, others blamed his father for their increasingly strained/ volatile relationship. They were asked five questions about the plot of the short story and related current affairs: (1) Why do you think that the majority of your colleagues wrote an ending in which something tragic or

catastrophic happened? Did the plot of the short story conduct you necessarily to think that this would be the likely outcome?; (2) Could Ali and Parvez's relationship be saved or is it utterly doomed, according to your interpretation of the short story?; (3) Was Ali a potential terrorist or just someone who stood for his beliefs?; (4) Is the level of religion radicalisation verified in other European countries likely to happen in Portugal?; (5) Are Christians also prone into being manipulated into violence? This interview was recorded. Subsequently, the audio recording was transcribed and analysed using Byram's (1997) framework of ICC. The transcript can be read in Ferreira (2019).

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned previously, the findings in this section come from an analysis of a learning journal of the students' written answers to the activities on the short story and from the analysis of an audio recording of a group interview.

4.1. Activities on "My Son the Fanatic"

The students were asked what they thought the main topic of the short story was. There was a range of responses to this question. Some students said it was the lack of respect between communities. Others wrote that the short story's moral was that religions were dangerous. Others believed that it was about parental failure. The interpretations were varied and the students' responses were intrinsically valued as long as they could be supported by arguments. The following two responses are paradigmatic of the first belief: "[…] you should not interfere in other people's religious beliefs just because it does not compute with ours" (Student A) and "…respecting everyone else's beliefs, even if they're different from ours. Everyone has the right to believe in what they want and to not be judged because of it" (Student B). The first answer entails a passive acceptance of otherness, and a linear understanding, not considering the complexity built around religious beliefs and radicalization. If religious beliefs incite hatred and violence, this perspective

should be more deeply considered. The second answer is more interesting because it presupposes a mutual respect for different values, but is reductive, and does not consider respect for other people's values and beliefs. Most of the answers of the third type were also lacking depth as they did not focus on beliefs and cultures, but rather on estranged family members (Ferreira, 2019).

Subsequently, I asked the students to research the definition of *jihad* in an encyclopaedia. Most students identified several types of jihad. For instance, "greater" jihad and "lesser" jihad. One student asked me if I wanted a personal response or political correctness. Since at this stage I wanted their answers to be as unfiltered as possible, I told him he should give his personal answer which was the following: "A jihad is a terrorist who believes in Allah" (Student C). This student did not achieve the desired outcome as he confused the word *jihad* with *jihadi* and was far from grasping the complexity of this cultural concept (Ferreira, 2019).

However, more insightful responses were achieved when students were asked about the religious principles by which Ali lived. Although they started writing their answers, they shared them orally with the group. They identified religious norms of Islam such as not eating pork, not drinking alcoholic beverages, praying five times a day and growing a beard. Most students even classified the first three as being mandatory by Islam and the latter as being disputed by several scholars. Afterwards, I asked the students if they thought these ideals were dangerous. The following answer shows a new level of understanding, reflection and analysis:

> No religious norm is intrinsically wrong or bad. The problem arises when they are misunderstood and taken too far. In this case, Ali not wanting to drink alcohol, for example, isn't bad. […]. But the way that Ali is quick to judge others who do not follows his life norms is where the real problem starts to emerge (Student D).

This answer took into account that each one should respect other cultural values as long as they are not enforced upon other people. This student came to the conclusion that Ali lacked intercultural attitudes because of his unwillingness to suspend disbelief about cultures different from his own.

Other activities promoted the development of skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*). The students were asked to compare Parvez and Ali's personalities taking into account their beliefs and behaviour. In the following answer, it is evident that the student analysed the intolerance each one had for the other's beliefs:

> Ali and Parvez's personalities are really different, but really similar at the same time. They are different in which Ali, an Islamic extremist, tried really hard to respect all the rules of Islam, even though not everything he did was mandatory. His father, however, didn't care about religion at all. They were both disrespectful towards each other's beliefs though, and this is where their personalities are really similar (Student E).

This student was able to identify that both characters held radical or self-centred views.

Finally, I asked the students to write, in pairs or groups of three, a summary of the short story in which they would have to change the ending. My goal was to ascertain whether the students thought that the relationship between father and son was doomed. Only in one out of nine written texts, was Parvez able to reconcile with his son:

> [...] Ali asked his father to pray with him, and explained his beliefs to him. Although he didn't agree with his son's life choices, he accepted that religion was an important part of his life. Still concerned about how Ali's life would end up, he promised himself and his son to be more active in his son's life, as an effort to understand him but also help guide him through life, as a good father should (students F and G).

Most narratives ended in tragedy, which was slightly puzzling. In most narratives Ali committed a terrorist attack with explosives, and in one text he committed suicide in his bedroom by hanging himself. This task could have promoted the development

of skills of interpreting and relating if the students not only depicted Ali's and Parvez's misunderstandings and ethnocentric attitudes, but also tried to mediate and overcome the conflicts.

4.2. Student interviews

In order to determine the consistency of the qualitative results, I interviewed five students on their answers to the activities and on current issues. The first three questions were related to the plot of the short story. The first one asked about the endings of their narratives. One student thought that most endings were tragic because both main characters of the short story had Middle Eastern ascendancy and therefore his/ her colleagues interpreted them in a prejudiced way. The fact that Parvez and Ali were of Pakistani descent, and not from the Middle East, shows that some students associate countries in which the majority of population is Muslim mainly with that region. It is important to underscore that Ali is British, had always lived in Britain and never went to Pakistan. It is possible to argue that this student and the others (as this relationship between the protagonists and the Middle East was not corrected by their colleagues during the interview) think that countries with Muslim majorities are culturally homogeneous.

The second question asked about whether Ali's and Parvez's relationship could be fixed. The students diverged greatly in their responses. They negotiated interpretations and defended their point of view, supporting their point of view with comments about the Qur'an. This type of analysis of sacred texts was superficial and therefore the students did not use skills of interpreting and relating in this instance. Nevertheless, they developed these skills when they identified Ali's and Parvez's conflicting cultural practices, values and beliefs. They also used them when they identified both character's ethnocentric attitudes (Ferreira, 2019).

Questions four and five dealt with an important issue represented in the text, which is religious radicalisation. This topic prompted students to discuss issues such as the refugee crisis, immigration policies, as well as the differences between Christianity and Islam. They used their background knowledge on world issues to

support their point of view and constructed their knowledge dialogically, which are some of the tenets of constructivism/ content-based learning**.** Question four, which was whether the level of religious radicalisation in Muslim communities in France and in the United Kingdom could spread to Portugal, sparked a particularly lively debate about the arrival of refugees to Portugal. One student (H) argued that Sweden's acceptance of "swarms of refugees" was related with an increase in rapes without evidence. Nevertheless, other students demanded proof, which showed that they could use critical thinking skills. Formal education should foster the development of media literacy because misinformation is prevalent in social media. This can be achieved by critically assessing in class the reliability of sources, as well as background data about articles, notably their author(s), date and source. Donald Trump was mentioned when students discussed the acceptance of refugees. Only one student supported his stance on immigration. In this instance, the students' beliefs and values were quite evident.

The differences between Christianity and Islam was also a fairly contentious subject. Even though all interviewees claimed to be religiously unaffiliated, one student (H) said the following about Christians: "But we don't blow ourselves up!". The usage of this pronoun contradicts their claims about their own religious identity. Another student (I) considered that there were cases of intolerance in Christian and Islamic religious communities, although "Westerners" only considered radical Muslims as terrorists. She said the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was an example of a violent sect/ terrorist group that professes Christian beliefs. This ability to compare the practices of extremists with different religious identities entails critical cultural awareness. Nevertheless, one student rebutted that the KKK did not exist anymore, which is false (Ferreira, 2019). Therefore, it is important to foster the acquisition of intercultural knowledge in class, which can be done by assigning a few follow-up research tasks on topics that are dealt with in the literary texts. I would like to underscore that it is important to guide the students during the research process to avoid selecting information from unreliable sources.

Although the group of students who were interviewed diverged significantly on their opinions about refugees, one student (J) tried to compromise by appealing to

their colleagues' empathy: "Have you tried putting yourself in their shoes?". This fosters the development of intercultural attitudes. Many students' answers also entailed to some extent the adoption of these attitudes (Ferreira, 2019).

Most students were able to develop ICC dimensions and gave answers supported by textual evidence. Nevertheless, some students still made claims that they could not prove. I consequently believe that students should carry out more research on social institutions and cultural practices related to the topics that are dealt with in the literary texts they will analyse in group. This project entailed analysing short stories on intercultural encounters and delivering an oral presentation on their conclusions, as well as negotiating meanings/ interpretations with a group with a different story.

In short, exploring a literary text with a content-based approach can promote meaning negotiation, skills of interpreting and relating, deeper awareness of one's identities and the way they may affect our perception of *Others* (critical cultural awareness). The participants gave more insightful answers when they discussed their perspectives/ analyses with each other. Furthermore, they developed the *savoir comprendre* skill when they compared both main characters' intolerance towards each other's beliefs and behaviours, although they did not seek to solve their conflict. In addition, some students were able to compare examples of Christian-inspired intolerance with cases of Muslim radicalisation.

5 CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, I was able to conclude that the students not only developed reading comprehension and writing subskills by analysing the short story and writing a narrative text about it, but also some degree of intercultural communicative competence, especially through meaningful discussions with the class. The dimensions which were developed the most were intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, as well as critical cultural awareness. It is evident that the students were familiar with several cultural concepts of Islam. In addition, they identified the intolerance the two main

characters had towards each other's beliefs and cultural practices. Moreover, it is important to underscore that students' interpretations are influenced by their own prior knowledge and experiences. Therefore, teachers should encourage students to reflect on their own beliefs, values and practices, and try to adopt the *Other*'s perspective. The students developed their intercultural awareness particularly during the interview, in which they negotiated meanings and interpretations, and became more aware of each other's identities. These findings are similar to those of Gómez (2012) since those participants were able to identify beliefs, traditions and values in the short stories, analyse issues related with them, adopt empathetic attitudes towards the characters and reflect on their own behaviour to avoid discriminatory attitudes. Another similarity is that all of the approaches were constructivist. Nonetheless, the present article is one of the few which focuses on a secondary-level class in a Portuguese context.

The aforementioned outcomes were possible through the adoption of Matos's (2012) reading model, which includes two stages - an affective dimension, which is more spontaneous, and a cognitive dimension, which is more reflexive. The comparison of the students' interpretations with each other's, the process of supporting their viewpoints with evidence, as well as their reflections about their own culture were part of the second stage. Moreover, the students' reflection on their beliefs and attitudes, as well as the subsequent transformation of their initial readings happened in a third space that does not correspond entirely to the reader's culture, nor to the ones depicted in the text. Since the students read the narrative for the first time in class and initially answered the questions individually and in writing, it was possible to register some spontaneous impressions on the main topic of the short story. Nevertheless, they could have been asked to register more impressions in a reading journal. The lack of abundant data to access the students' more spontaneous reactions to specific passages of the narrative is a shortcoming of this article.

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APPENDIX A – ACTIVITIES ON "MY SON THE FANATIC"

Pre-Task

1. Use an online dictionary or encyclopaedia to define, in your own words, the concept "jihad".

Task

A.

1. After having read the short story "My Son the Fanatic", by Hanif Kureishi, state what do you think is the main idea of the short story.

2. Take into account the following responses to question 1 given by some of your colleagues:

   a) "Religions bring a lot of trouble."

   b) "The main idea of this story is that you should not interfere in other people's religious beliefs just because it does not compute with ours."

   c) "The main idea of this short story is the incapability of accepting in our society. Throughout the story a lot of conflicts have been unleashed due to religion. Personally, I understand why".

   d) "I think the main idea of this story is that respecting each other's beliefs is extremely important, and that communication is necessary – one should never get to the point of having no idea what is going on in the lives of those they care the most about."

   a) "This short story explores the stereotypes and culture clashes, not only in our society but inside our family space, and also show how difficult it is to have a different religion of the society where we are inserted, not being able to have our own identity and respect."

   2.1. Choose three of the previous opinions and discuss them in groups of four. You should use the plot of the short story to support your ideas or examples you see/hear in the media. Try to persuade your colleagues.

3. Compare Ali and Parvez's personality. In what characteristics are they similar to each other and how are they different from one another? Justify your answer, taking into account their beliefs and behaviour.

4. Which are the religious norms by which Ali lives? Try to distinguish which are explicitly mandatory according to Islam and which are not.

   4.1.Are any of those religious norms particularly dangerous? Justify your opinion.

5. In your opinion, what may have been the causes of Ali's rapid process of radicalisation?

6. Explain the reason why Parvez's wife has no name in the story, nor a voice.

7. Interpret the following quote: "The boy neither covered himself nor retaliated. There was no fear in his eyes" (ll. 390-391).

B.

Summarize the short story "My Son the Fanatic", by Hanif Kureishi, (until line 339) in about 220 words. Then write a different ending. Total length: 300-340 words.