

The movie *Crash* as an available design for learning English: reflecting about identities, power relations and violence with High School students on Padlet

O filme *Crash* como um *design* disponível para a aprendizagem de inglês: refletindo sobre identidades, relações de poder e violência com estudantes do Ensino Médio no *Padlet*

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Abstract

The main goal of this article is to present a research frame (Fonseca, 2024), bringing up alternatives to critical linguistic education (Pennycook, 2018) in order to reflect about identities, power relations and violence, using the movie *Crash* as a starting point for high school students' discussion on Padlet at a federal technical school. The study goes beyond recognizing diversity because it brings up questions regarding social and cultural tensions in the movie dialogues and scenes through the critical (Monte Mór, 2015;2018) and visual (Ferraz, 2017;2019) literacies perspective along with multiliteracies pedagogy (Kalantzis; Cope; Pinheiro, 2022). The movie discussion tackling conflict dialogues on Padlet creates opportunities for social engagement as well as agency, questioning dominant systems and tension in cultural identities (Hall, 2014; Woodward, 2014) in a movement that encourages sharing voices and listening to others while constructing meaning on the digital board. In order to understand the students' perceptions, data was collected through field notes, posts on the digital mural and semistructured interviews, observing the experience with the film and critical dialogues in the English class through a qualitative analysis based on interpretation. The research, then, is carried out as a collaborative action research (Tripp, 2005; Duboc, 2012; Thiollent, 2011) for the film activity development (Ferraz; Tomizuca, 2021; Monte Mór, 2018) in collaboration with the teacher and the students. The analysis of meaning construction during the movie activity points out that the students not only receive well the critical visual literacy proposal, but expand the discussion in a significant way, bringing up new questioning and active participation in group work for future practices.

Keywords: Critical and Visual literacy. Multiliteracies pedagogy. Language learning. Cultural identities.

Resumo

O objetivo principal desse artigo é apresentar um recorte de pesquisa (Fonseca, 2024), trazendo alternativas para a educação linguística crítica (Pennycook, 2018) para refletir sobre identidades, relações de poder e violência, usando o filme *Crash* como ponto de partida para a discussão dos estudantes do Ensino Médio no Padlet em uma escola técnica federal. O estudo vai além de reconhecer a diversidade, trazendo questões relacionadas às tensões culturais e sociais nos diálogos e cenas do filme a partir da perspectiva do letramento crítico (Monte Mór, 2015;2018) e visual (Ferraz, 2017;2019) junto com a pedagogia dos multiletramentos (Kalantzis; Cope; Pinheiro, 2022). A discussão sobre o filme abordando diálogos de conflito no Padlet cria oportunidades para o engajamento social e agência, questionando sistemas dominantes e embates de identidades culturais (Hall, 2014; Woodward, 2014) em um movimento que encoraja o compartilhamento de vozes e a escuta enquanto os sentidos são construídos no mural digital. Para entender as percepções dos estudantes, os dados foram gerados em notas de campo, postagens no mural digital e entrevistas semiestruturadas, observando a experiência com o filme e diálogos críticos na aula de inglês por meio de uma análise qualitativa baseada na interpretação. A pesquisa, então, é conduzida como uma pesquisa-ação colaborativa (Tripp, 2005; Duboc, 2012; Thiollent, 2011) para o desenvolvimento da atividade do filme (Ferraz; Tomizuca, 2021; Monte Mór, 2018) em colaboração com a professora e os estudantes. A análise da construção de sentidos durante a atividade destaca que os estudantes não apenas receberam bem a proposta de letramento crítico e visual, mas expandiram a discussão de maneira significativa, propondo novos questionamentos e participação ativa no trabalho em grupo para outras práticas.

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Palavras-chave: Letramento crítico e visual. Pedagogia dos multiletramentos. Aprendizagem de línguas. Identidades culturais

1 Introdução

This article is about the use of the movie *Crash* (Haggis, 2004) in the English class and the process of meaning construction on *Padlet*² afterwards, theorizing the social and political context in language studies, going beyond the technical and linguistic knowledge and embracing a human and political position. As Pennycook (2018, p. 49) points out “English and English teaching cannot be rejected but need to be understood in their specific localities”, opening spaces for listening to students. The author shows that Critical Applied Linguistics can be defined as a starting point to understand language as a political act, problematizing power relations, differences and ideologies. He states that the work is “grounded in both the everyday concerns around gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, politics and ideology” (Pennycook, 2018, p.37). Opening space for movie discussion and facing small ruptures, then, can be a starting point to connect the dots between local singularities and language use in broader social interactions based on movie dialogues and scenes interpretation. In other words, encouraging students to question and shift hegemonic patterns through a collaborative perspective and agency in order to design future practices afterwards (Monte Mór, 2018b; Rocha *et al.*, 2016).

This article, then, demonstrates the journey and restlessness of an English teacher working with High School students in a federal institute, going beyond the borders of English learning or technical and specific purposes and embracing critical and visual literacies perspectives (Monte Mór, 2015, 2018; Luke, 2013,2014; Rocha; Maciel, 2015; Kalantzis; Cope; Pinheiro, 2022; Ferraz, 2017, 2018) in dialogue with cultural studies (Silva, 2014; Hall, 2014; Woodward, 2014) in order to plan and carry out activities for the English class from a critical and multimodal way. I present here a frame of the data collected based on one of the activities carried out during a broader research, based on the movie *Crash* (Haggis, 2004) that tackles ethnic, cultural and social tensions as well as power relations through prejudice and violence through a visual and critical literacy practice (Monte Mór, 2018; Ferraz, 2017; Ferraz; Tomikuza, 2021). Throughout the activity it was possible to reflect on cultural, ethnic and social identities entangled in the local and global contexts. Working with movies through conversations and scenes that frame social tensions and power disputes through cultural differences and identities may be a starting point for an exercise of critical and visual practices.

² *Padlet*. Disponível em: <https://padlet.com/>

Besides that, the collaborative research presented here is based on Ministry of Education guidelines and actions for practices concerning ethnic and racial relations in Call n. 4 (Brasil, 2018). However, these official initiatives are seen as cross-cutting themes according to Silva (2014). For him, we need to go beyond the proclamation of diversity in the classroom, questioning the liberal and essentialized perspective to respect and tolerate difference because it is not crystallized. According to the author, we should focus on the difference as a process, in other words, a pedagogy and a school curriculum that would not be limited to celebrate it all around us, but offer ways in the classroom to problematize all the tensions involved.

In the same direction, Curriculum Orientation for High School (Brasil, 2006), the Course Pedagogical Project (IFSP, 2021) and the Institution Linguistic Policy (Brasil, 2019) favor language teaching and learning focusing on students' agency and the critical perspective, making it possible to think and see the world through wide angle and plural lens. These documents, then, reinforce what Silva (2014) points out, inviting us to design actions and pedagogical possibilities for the classroom based on the socio-historical language perspective. This way, meaning making represents a social construction where students get a chance to share their voices and act in the world, questioning hegemonic patterns and seeking for alternatives that may bring change. The main goal is to investigate the situations that emerge from critical and visual literacy practices along with multiliteracies pedagogy (Kalantzis; Cope; Pinheiro, 2022), having language as well as social, cultural and ethnic tensions as a common ground. In other words, a critical literacy exercise as an opportunity to learn together and expand our vision through a movie discussion that tackles social, cultural and power tensions in order to think about future actions involving movies as an ongoing cycle for critical conversations among students.

This article describes one of the activities planned and carried out during the research in order to answer the following research questions: (1) How do students receive the critical and visual literacy proposal, collaboratively constructing the discussion on *Padlet*?; (2) How does group work evolve and what comes up as agency based on students' contributions?; (3) How do students use their perceptions, repertoires and language to construct new alternatives and meaning? Throughout these questions, the study relevance can be considered by analyzing the shift critical literacy practices may encourage (Monte Mór, 2018), becoming essential to citizenship action nowadays and democratic participation (Rocha: Maciel, 2015).

2 Designing the activity based on the critical and visual literacies perspective

Nowadays, cultural studies and questions related to identity and difference are important to think conflict and power relations over (Silva, 2014; Hall, 2014; Woodward, 2014). These aspects are represented and analyzed in the movie *Crash* (Haggis, 2004) along with multiliteracies pedagogy, critical and visual literacies, seeking for possibilities to expand the way we see and interpret the scenes and the world through language practices. A critical pedagogical practice in the English classroom may allow students to construct meaning in a more engaged way and at the same time open spaces for conversations in the classroom. A critical linguistic education that, through problematization, makes it possible for students to know themselves and the other, question and shift representations, looking for new designs to experience the locality and the world in a collective and collaborative way. Reality structure is never permanent considering that is constantly changing and incomplete. Shifting the structure or expanding our vision, then, means that alterity is part of the world and we become aware that every knowledge is limited and not the exact and complete reflection of the social world. Challenging and questioning social relations, problematized here through the movie scenes in the activity based on cultural studies, identity and difference issues opens space in the classroom discussion for transforming or imagining new alternatives.

As it was mentioned before, issues embraced and entangled by cultural studies are significant to the critical decolonial perspective (Pennycook, 2018) and intercultural education, viewing the research process as a departure point grounded here and now, but not as a promise of arrival or a final destination designed in a general and distant way. Ruptures may occur or not, but we need to open space for uncomfortable conversations, recognizing ourselves and the other through pedagogical practices based on movies. The activity proposal that is described here may enable students' discussion and reflection about different cultural background while emphasizing power tensions, confronting one another through the complexity of beliefs and representations students may have of themselves and society entanglements, bringing up possible transformation or not. Identity and cultural difference experienced in the movie scenes and dialogues are as unstable as the language which they depend on (Woodward, 2014).

Considering the theoretical background now, critical literacy can be defined, then, as an “exercise of shift and rupture, becoming crucial to democratic participation, as a way of resistance to hegemonic discourses and forces”³ (Rocha; Maciel, 2015, p. 20), presenting itself as an orientation for collaborative work in the classroom. For Luke (2014, p. 21), the term represents “the use of the

³ No original: “exercício de deslocamento e de ruptura, mostrando-se crucial para a participação democrática, como modo de resistência a discursos e forças hegemônicas” (Rocha; Maciel, 2015, p. 20)

technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of institutions and everyday life". In her turn, Monte Mór (2015) points out that critical literacy presents a political nature considering the power relations involved, comprehending that every discourse is permeated by ideologies no matter what modality it presents. These authors' considerations bring up important questions for English teachers: from what sources do we open space in the classroom to listen to our students and such discussions serve whose interests? Tílio (2015) suggest the use of authentic material to work with cross cutting themes, raising awareness about other perspectives and going beyond borders language structure and vocabulary, making the learning experience a social practice. Along with the critical literacy, it is necessary to embrace the visual literacy that also goes along with multiliteracies pedagogy and the activity proposal presented here.

Considering this, Mizan (2019) shows that visual literacy came up with the desire to embrace other languages in literacies studies that would expand the traditional ways to construct meaning. On the other hand, Felten (2008) defines visual literacy as the ability to comprehend, produce and use images, objects and visible movements in a cultural meaningful way, being learned together with other literacy practices. Ferraz (2019) also invites to look beyond traditional views of representation where the teacher usually guides the interpretation path during the activities. For this researcher, when we insert images in movement for the students, we should create space for their contributions, listening to them in order to create opportunities to see and feel further.

Social and cultural differences and tensions presented in movies and other media can become, then, an important resource for critical positionality through literacies practice and identities in constant movement of transformation, looking for engagement about issues that affect the present moment and active citizenship as Kalantzis, Cope and Pinheiro (2022) point out. According to these authors, multiliteracies pedagogy represent a pedagogical proposal, understanding that language and other ways to construct meaning bring up a multimodal and dynamic representation process, being constantly reconstructed through infinite possibilities for meanings and cultural experiences. Based on learning practices that can bring noise and disruption to social and power relations, we can look beyond what is useful for working situations in terms of language, expanding possibilities to perceive and feel tensions that affect many of us not in order to come up with a universal solution. In others words, opening space in the classroom to imagine alternatives together and strengthen sensibilities. The experimentation with the movie discussion becomes, then, a classroom movement in the English learning journey not

necessarily connected to a set of prescriptions, but a process of discovering wide angle and plural lens together and inviting for future reflections afterwards.

Based on multiliteracies pedagogy (Cope; Kalantzis; Pinheiro, 2022), critical and visual literacies as a design possibility expands the conservative conception that emphasizes grammatical aspects, opening space for meaning construction through videos and movies and multiple interpretations. According to these researchers, we live in a world of designs that flow in an ongoing cycle of meaning designs in the learning process journey, having as a starting point the available designs. That is, resources to construct meaning found in communication artifacts, tools for representation that can be redesigned and reconstructed afterwards, opening space for creative designing. Finally, we reach the re-designed process, bringing new and alternative available designs. This ongoing cycle as well as the possible discoveries and tensions revealed along the way allow space for discussion, creativity and agency among students. The following illustration shows how students can freely transit in knowledge processes through multimodal practices.

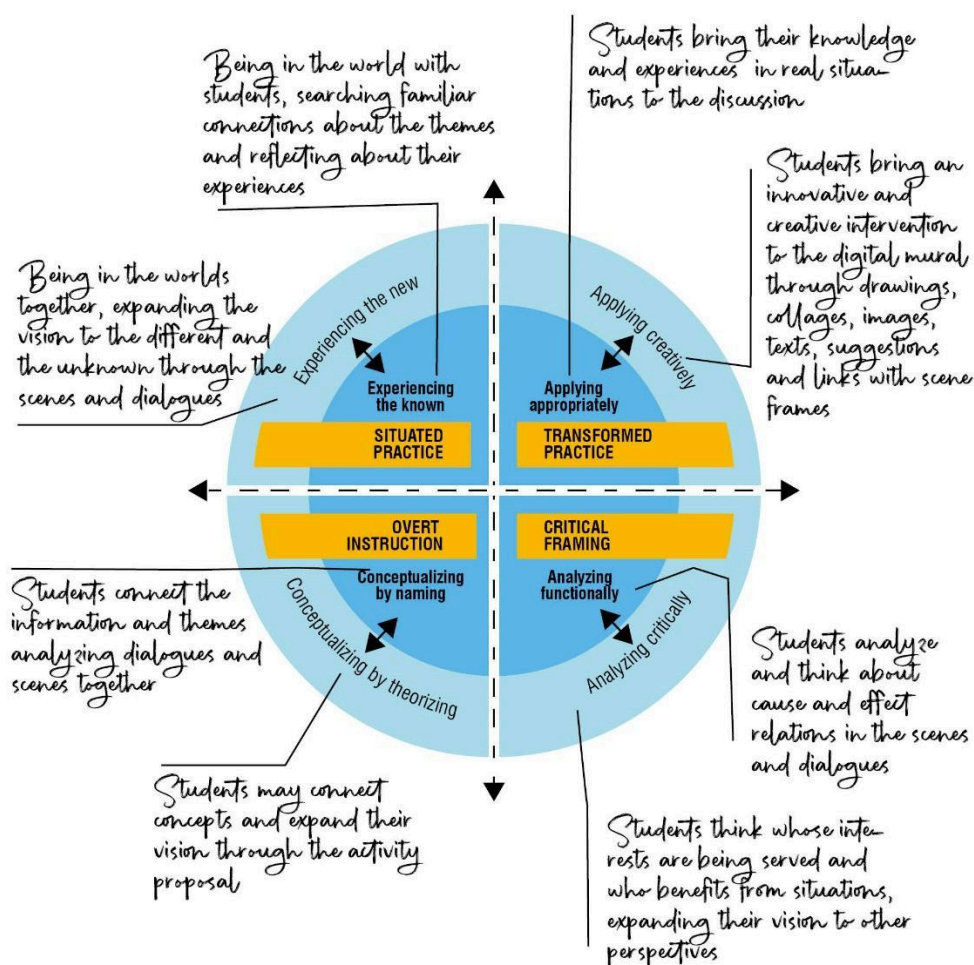


Figure 1. Knowledge processes in the research journey
Source: Fonseca (2024, p. 125) adapted from Brum (2019, p.110)

Many studies that present the English teaching and learning process from a critical perspective based on multimodal practices and active citizenship have inspired this research including the work of Rocha; Maciel (2015), Tílio (2015), Monte Mór (2015;2018), Jordão (2017), Ferraz (2017) e Ferraz e Tomikuza (2021), helping in the planning and in the investigation of critical discussions based on movies.

Jordão (2017, p. 205) points out that critical literacy allows that “each local space determines its procedures, its methodology and its literacy practices – there is no specific method, a determined recipe, a set of procedures”⁴, since this position is anchored on local knowledge and on the post method perspective. In other words, the theoretical background defended here values students’ agency and creativity to construct new meanings and possibilities.

This activity presented here, part of a broader research (Fonseca, 2024), comes as a possibility to question and face hegemonic discourses and practices, not simply watching the movie scenes but experiencing the conversations that pop up after the activity, sharing different interpretations and getting to know themselves, others and the surrounding, articulating new designs from the violence patterns they perceived. This experience of watching a movie together, discussing and bringing posts to the digital collaborative mural on Padlet can become an alternative for facing difference all around and expanding the way we see ourselves, others, cultural identities and world visions. It is worth mentioning that the students watch the movie in English with Portuguese subtitles, but can carry out the discussion in Portuguese and post on Padlet in the language they choose to interpret the available design.

3 Methodological path

The study was carried out as a collaborative action research (Thiollent, 2011; Duboc, 2012), interacting and constantly exchanging information with the freshman year class teacher, a member from the socio pedagogical team on campus and the students (CAAE68528723.1.0000.8160). The research context is the Federal Institute where I also work as an English teacher for High School and undergraduate students. The institution is located in São Paulo state in a medium sized city with

⁴ No original: “cada espaço local determine seus procedimentos, sua metodologia, suas práticas de letramento – não existe um método específico, um determinado receituário, um conjunto de procedimentos” (Jordão, 2017, p.205)

approximately sixty thousand people, attracting many tourists during holidays and winter season, but facing several social issues.

In this specific article, I tackled only one activity carried out during the research based on the movie *Crash* as an available design, following the knowledge processes presented by Kalantzis, Cope and Pinheiro (2022): (1) experiencing the known and the new; (2) conceptualizing by naming; (3) analyzing functionally and critically; (4) applying appropriately and creatively through design learning. The activity and its objectives are presented below. This way it was possible to reflect, plan and carry out the activity in the classroom in order to think about future actions involving movies based on the data collected.

Atividade 2	Date that was carried out: October 19 and 26, 2023
Theme	Cultural identities and social inequalities among immigrants, violence and prejudice
Resource (available design)	Film <i>Crash</i> (Haggis, 2004)
Objective	Problematize different forms of prejudice, inequalities and power relations as well as the possibility to be transformed or not by interacting with the other, the different through the scenes' interpretations.

Figura 2. Activity 2 description.
Source: Fonseca (2024).

The research data were generated from such activity development, analyzing the research notes where registers from the initial discussion were written down, the posts from the digital mural on *Padlet* where students could express themselves regarding the issues problematized in the movie through multimodal texts (texts, images and scenes links) based on the activity guidelines and finally the semi structured interviews with four volunteer students in order to analyze their experience in the classroom and future suggestions. The audio interviews with volunteer students were recorded on the cell phone and lasted around fifteen minutes. The students were asked to talk about their perceptions regarding the activity and their group work, also suggesting possibilities for future practices.

Data organization process based on interpretative analysis involved categorizing the information gathered throughout the research, identifying and systematizing the data by themes such as Lankshear and Knobel (2004) and Gil (1999) suggest.

3 Outcome discussion

Data analysis took place in a descriptive manner and through interpreting knowledge processes, observing how students acted and reacted in critical framing and creatively applying. This way it was possible to reflect on the first round of movie discussion, the collaborative contributions and group work on Padlet and the recorded interviews afterwards.

After watching the movie together in the classroom, there was an initial discussion the following class where students considered bigotry in local environment as well, demonstrating creativity and action while discussing the scenes and possibilities to share stories on their own terms. During this time, they could also understand that ideas' construction may come up from tensions and they started sharing their perspectives about certain scenes in order to warm up and break into smaller groups for the Padlet construction. They were able to experience the known and the new, reflecting about their own experience regarding prejudice and at the same time being immersed in a cycle of violence where Los Angeles immigrants crashed into each other and into the local community based on the activity guidelines. They could also conceptualize by naming, grouping and connecting different forms of prejudice and violence involving the immigrants in different scenes. Finally, it was possible for them to critically analyze the perspectives, the interests being served, the director's agenda and the actors and actresses as group's representations in order to creatively apply an intervention through a certain scene. These were the steps presented in the activity handout the students received.



Figure 3. Students working in groups to post on Padlet.
 Source: Fonseca (2024).

Data also showed that students received well the activity proposal that invited them to think about bigotry and violence against immigrants and they bridged the movie scenes in different ways through images and texts in order to expand the initial discussion through Padlet posts. They could also

bring new questioning through the posts embracing the critical and visual literacy perspective that inspired the activity. A group, for instance, brings an image of broken glass gathered on internet to express the ruptures and crashes they felt through the movie, problematizing on their post how people keep getting judged by the way they dress or talk, how people are becoming more violent to label and exclude others and invite us to think where we are heading with all this. They also point out that some characters have a chance to think their behavior over and change, mentioning the housewife who had constant rage episodes, but question if such transformation was a real one or due to being vulnerable at the time. Collaborative group work to create the posts for Padlet also demonstrated a fruitful space to expand the initial discussion and the students' evaluation during the interviews also pointed towards this direction, demonstrating the importance of speaking, listening to other perspectives and learning from the differences from an available design like a movie, for instance.

Not only in the initial discussion with the whole group but also on multimodal posts on Padlet that were created in smaller groups afterwards, students brought new questioning to the picture, coming up with other issues regarding violence, power relations and racism. Through the posts students' perceptions based on the movie (available design) can be observed as well as their designing to construct meaning through group work and their re-designing, presenting new questions to the scenes and bringing more noise to the tensions. The question is, how do we allow space in the classroom to listen to students and to one another in order to share their perceptions and life experiences, understanding that talks and collaborative work from an available design such as a movie may provoke ideas that go beyond a single story that has been familiar or naturalized somehow.

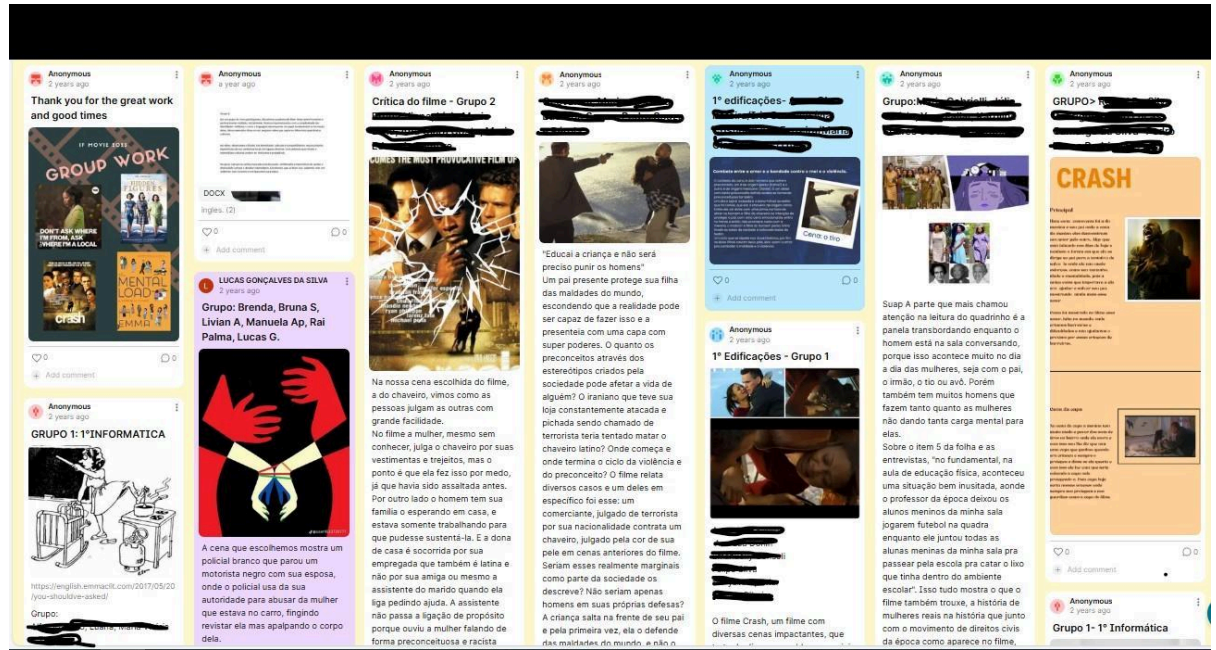


Figure 3. Group work contributions on Padlet.
Source: Fonseca (2024).

Finally, the audio recorded interviews with the volunteer students (names were changed) reinforce the importance of such spaces and activities to encourage difficult talks, expanding their vision to power relations, language and exclusion in local and global contexts.

“So, they bring a great learning and in an easy way and helps to discuss important themes in the classroom listening to other people’s opinion about the scene” (Excerpt 4 – interview with the student Isabel)

“I think the films are good to initiate the discussion, but many things are inside us and that few people will really look and say wow I’m like this, I have to change this, this is wrong. We can see this here. For example, here in class, some people didn’t feel good discussing the prejudice scenes in Crash, they don’t accept and say it’s nagging and don’t have empathy, but we got a chance to speak too, show the other side and they listened too. It is important to work with the theme in class because but not kind for example how it is only sometimes or like a poster in the hallway or whatever and everyone walks by.” (Excerpt 5 – interview with the student Renata)

“For me the development was great because we are familiar with the theme, it is a theme we know and learn to talk about it listening in another language like in the scenes and dialogues that we separated and analyzed together was very important.” (Excerpt 6 – interview with the student Victória)

In the excerpts above, the students recognize the importance of the activity involving the movie that invites them to problematize xenophobia, expanding their vision to power relations and other violent tension that occur in the scenes, indicating the relevance of the theme and the space created to listen to

one another. However, in Excerpt 5, the student Renata pointed out that some people did not feel comfortable discussing prejudice in the scenes, but they were able to listen to other perspectives as well. According to Rocha and Maciel (2015) issues related to power from the critical perspective should be embraced in language teaching in order to confront and destabilize hegemonic discourses, inequalities, social exclusion and violence. Mattos (2018, p. 36) also shows that critical linguistic education as a “border space where many forms of knowledge can get in touch and influence one another”⁵, having a connection to what the students mentioned about the opportunity for speaking and showing the other side of the story, listening to others and even recognizing what is unacceptable. As Monte Mór (2018) also emphasizes a critical literacy proposal can develop the way we see and perceive the world, bringing to the set pictures that had not been observed or even thought about before, allowing people to be transformed during the process.

4 Final remarks

The activity was able to contribute and open space for important discussion among students, recognizing knowledge of who they are who they are becoming while constructing meaning and bringing provocative questions to *Padlet* such as where we are heading or where the violence cycle stops. It was also possible to identify how students received and expanded the critical and visual literacy proposal through the initial discussion, the posts on Padlet and the interviews. They did not only receive well the activity and idea to work collaboratively and creatively on *Padlet*, but they demonstrated engagement through the whole discussion process, connecting their interpretation to local setting as well.

The study has its limitations since not all schools offer an educational context with more freedom and structure to plan such activities considering the technological support in class, internet access for students to use their phones with pedagogical intention in order to create their posts. But it is possible to say that this research journey can offer possibilities for articulating critical dialogues in the English class through movie discussion and collaborative multimodal work on *Padlet*, inviting for new reflections and actions involving such activities based on students’ agency and suggestions.

In other words, the critical intercultural orientation and tension perception in the movie scenes and dialogues, involving the contact of different ethnic groups, cultures and genres helped to articulate the critical and visual proposal for the English class. The activity invited students, then, to question

⁵ No original: “local fronteira onde variadas formas de conhecimento podem entrar em contato e influenciar umas às outras” (Mattos, 2018, p.36)

power relations, xenophobia, violence against ethnic groups, immigration and inequalities of all kinds, using the movie frames as a starting point for meaning construction and possibilities for other talks. According to Cope, Kalantzis and Pinheiro (2022), movies and other digital media can bring a pedagogical opportunity to work with themes that affect the world and local community as well, creating space for students' experiences and creative agency through several tools and at the same time encourage other sensibilities and knowledge for the classroom through wide-angle lens. The conclusion of such activity does not represent a finish line or a final constructed product or destination, but a space for reflection of the here and now in society without imposing a universal thought. The take away we get from such practice is the continuous conversations we will allow considering what one of the students suggested in the recorded interview, trying to comprehend the entanglements we face and confront in everyday life regarding social and cultural identities and how different discourses affect and influence the way we think, act and coexist in the world, seeing and feeling society through plural lens (Menezes de Souza, 2011). The issue, then, is to make sure we open these spaces to listen to our students' life experiences and keep investigating how these movie discussions can question or perpetuate violent patterns and single stories. The ongoing action research cycle may proceed in search of new available designs to challenge social hierarchies that structure the world and the local environment in small rupture movements to look beyond borders, recognizing ourselves and others and possibly provoking transformation or not through the contacts we have.

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Data de submissão: 11/09/2025. Data de aprovação: 14/09/2025.