Mediation(s) in an on-line, multilingual teacher education environment

Mediação(ões) num ambiente multilingue e on-line de formação de professores

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Abstract

In the paper, we e examine the concept of mediation, through an analysis of an on-line, multilingual teacher education environment. In particular, we analyse the exchanges of the participants during an on-line session aimed at teacher development in Intercomprehension theories and practices. Due to the pluralistic approach to teacher education adopted in the session, linguistic diversity is accepted by the participant as a natural ingredient of communication, so that clashes are usually absent or not directly thematised.

We have adopted a socioconstructivist approach to mediation, anchored in the detailed presentation of the collaborative communicative scenario. We intend to describe how mediation, and especially cognitive and relational mediation, works in such an educational environment. Mediation is understood by participants as a shared responsibility, deployed collaboratively and, therefore, as a communicative process and strategic educational tool supporting collaborative professional development. Hence, mediation closely relates to and depends on shared and co-constructed linguistic, cognitive and emotional dispositions.

Keywords: on-line mediation practices, cognitive and relational mediation, intercomprehension, teacher education.

Resumo:

Neste artigo desenvolvemos um enfoque abrangente sobre o conceito de mediação, através da análise de um ambiente multilingue e on-line de formação de professores. Em particular, analisamos as interações dos participantes durante uma sessão de formação on-line orientada para o desenvolvimento profissional no que concerne às teorias e práticas de intercompreensão.

A nossa abordagem segue uma perspetiva socioconstrutivista sobre a mediação, ancorada numa apresentação detalhada do cenário comunicativo colaborativo. Pretendemos descrever como a mediação, principalmente a mediação cognitiva e relacional, funciona neste ambiente formativo. Os resultados mostram que a mediação é entendida pelos participantes como sendo uma responsabilidade compartilhada, construída de forma colaborativa e, sendo assim, como um processo comunicativo e uma ferramenta educacional estratégica que apoia o desenvolvimento profissional. Logo, a mediação relaciona-se e depende de disposições linguísticas, cognitivas e emocionais compartilhadas e co-construídas por esta comunidade profissional.

Palavras-chave: práticas de mediação on-line, mediação cognitiva e relacional, intercompreensão, formação de professores.

Résumé

Dans ce texte nous développons une approche élargie du concept de médiation, par l'analyse d'un environnement multilingue et on-line de formation d'enseignants. Plus particulièrement, nous analysons les interactions des participants pendant une session de formation orientée vers le développement professionnel en ce qui concerne les théories et pratiques de l'intercompréhension.

Notre approche adopte une perspective socioconstructiviste de la médiation, ancrée sur une présentation détaillée du scénario communicatif et collaboratif de formation. Notre objectif est de décrire comment la médiation, en particulier la médiation cognitive et relationnelle, fonctionne dans un environnement avec ces caractéristiques. Les résultats montrent que la médiation est comprise par les participants comme une responsabilité partagée à construire de façon collaborative : ainsi, la médiation devient un processus communicatif et un outil stratégique qui soutient et stimule le développement professionnel de ces professeurs La médiation dépend donc de dispositions linguistiques, cognitives et socioaffectives partagées et co-construites par cette communauté professionnelle.

Mots-clés : Pratiques de médiation on-line, médiation cognitive et relationnelle, intercompréhension, formation de professeurs.

Introduction

The concept of mediation has gained a central space in the theoretical landscape of Foreign Languages Education (FLE) since the publication of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (also CEFRL, 2001), and, more recently, with the publications of standards to evaluate this complex ability (Council of Europe, 2017). So far, studies related to mediation have focused mainly on its (re)definition, in comparison with other associated concepts such as repair, transference, translation, scaffolding or negotiation, describing bilingual environments in so called 'sequences of repair' or 'remediation situations' (Van Lier,

1988). Other studies analyse how mediation has been interpreted in foreign language learning theories, and how it has been included in foreign language textbooks (Authors). In this study, our aim is to continue these lines of inquiry, expanding the concept of mediation beyond that of the mere resolution or prevention of communicative clashes, and purely linguistic aspects.

As FLE increasingly acts beyond the school and other educational contexts, with research and intervention in different multilingual and multicultural fields, the concept of mediation has gained a central role as a tool for understanding the construction of a social bond between individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. From the perspective of co-action (Puren, 2009) in multilingual and multicultural settings, mediation can be used as a heuristic tool to understand the functioning of this specific communication setting. In this perspective, the concept has recently gained semantic density, both as an interactional product and an interactional process: as a product, because it is the result of the cooperative dispositions of individuals and their joint actions; as a process, because it refers to efforts in constructing this social link, materialized through collaboration and co-action. As a matter of fact, all meeting spaces between individuals in a situation of (linguistic, cultural, professional, generational…) plurality and diversity necessarily deal with negotiation processes, cognitive adaptation, compromise and, therefore, with mediation. Thus, mediation could be said to be one of the underlying elements constituting these situations.

In the present study, we analyse the strategies enacted by a group of teachers from different languages and countries, in order to communicate, share and build professional knowledge during an on-line professional development experience. We will try to highlight the usefulness of the concept of mediation to understand how professional development is built socially. Professional development is understood as an ongoing and continuing process (Guskey, 2000), embracing knowledge, skills, dispositions and expertise, and their mutual influence. This process takes place in social environments of 'professional quest', aimed at the co-construction of the 'professional self' (Alarcão, Leitão, & Roldão, 2009; Marcelo, 2009) amongst, with and through the presence of the Other.

We consider the observed teaching group as a community of practice. Without going into details on the current debate on this definition (Andriessen, 2005), we use it to refer to "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder 2002, p. 7). The concept is useful to our work as it acknowledges that a

> *community of practice relies on situated theory of knowledge, i.e., the idea that knowledge is a property enacted by groups of people over time in shared practices, rather than the idea that knowledge is a cognitive residue in the head of an individual learner. (Hoadley, 2012, p. 299).*

With these theoretical assumptions in mind, we collected and selected a *corpus* of discussion forum interactions which took place in a teacher education program on the Galapro platform ("Education of educators for intercomprehension in Romance Languages"). After an overview of the conceptual framework of mediation, we will describe the discursive mediation practices in this platform, relating them to the specific communicative environment (on-line, multilingual and intercultural) and its goals (teacher development in Intercomprehension theories and practices). Our aim is to describe how mediation works in on-line, multilingual teacher education

environments, in particular its roles and dynamics. In order to achieve this goal, we will seek to answer the following research questions: in which communicative activities is it possible to identify actions of mediation by the participants? Which roles and dynamics can be linked to mediation, beyond linguistic problems or communicative clashes? How does mediation contribute to the co-construction of a common professional ethos in a multilingual and multicultural environment?

Mediation: a theoretical overview

Definition of mediation: recent developments

Mediation has become a central concept in language (teacher) education in the last two decades. Over time, the focus of research has shifted from the activity of translation itself from one language into another, to a broader conception of mediation as a means of building bridges between languages, cultures and speakers (Aden & Weissmann, 2012; Chi & Derivry, 2009; Coste, 2014; Eisenlohr, 2004; Levy & Zarate, 2003; Stalder & Tonti, 2014; Machetti & Siebetcheu, 2017). Nevertheless, in this new language education landscape, there is a relative dearth of studies focusing on mediation's (re)definition and scope, on its specificities, in comparison with other concepts such as repair, translation, interpretation or scaffolding, and on its heuristic productivity in teacher education.

The theoretical framework for mediation has so far been mainly constructed around the analysis of situations involving resolution of communicative problems or their remediation through anticipation. Mediation has itself been conceived as a competence in its own right (in the CEFRL, 2001), but it has mostly been analysed within the field of legal or diplomatic affairs, where the mediator brings the parties into dialogue, after a conflict or rupture. If we move to other fields of research, namely language education, mediation has been understood as an 'interlinguistic' communicative strategy (Farini, 2014; Stathopoulou, 2013), where the mediator must convey meaning from one language into another (translation or interpretation), in a bilingual environment:

> In both the receptive and productive modes, the written and/or oral activities of **mediation** make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly. Translation or interpretation, a paraphrase, summary or record, provides for a third party a (re)formulation of a source text to which this third party does not have direct access. Mediating language activities – (re)processing an existing text – occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies. (CEFRL, 2001, p.14).

Our perspective goes beyond the idea of mediation as a generally neutral activity in which meanings are simply converted from one language into another by a neutral subject, since we too find that this is a

> definition that underestimates the twists and turns that meanings can take in the midst of negotiation between interlocutors, and it ignores the social function of mediation, which is none the less broadly accepted in various fields where the handling of intermediate cultural and social space is a professional concern' (Gohard-Radenkovic, Lussier, Penz, & Zarate, 2003, p.218).

Furthermore, if mediation intimately integrates and frames all relationships between individuals and the social and cultural environment (Caune, 2008), it necessarily has a symbolic role, since all words, expressions, practices and gestures are socioculturally situated (Donato & MacCormick, 1994).

From an interactional perspective, the concept of mediation is generally related to a communicative activity between social actors who do not share the same linguistic resources – be it different languages or different varieties of a language –, and to communicative problems arising in those situations. Languages are seen as sources of communicative clashes that must be solved or avoided and the main focus of the analysis is on the emergence and resolution of problems, namely in sequences of repair, understood as "the treatment of trouble occurring in interactive language use" (van Lier, 1988, p.183). Following van Lier, who focuses on the foreign language classroom, a sequence of repair develops in three moments: emergence of the problem (or *trouble source*), communicative resolution and closure. The task of the mediator is to overcome the communicative problem, analysing its sources (lexical opacity, inadequacy of word choice, ...) and employing different means and strategies to solve it (repetition, translation, paraphrase, gestures,...), at the same time decreasing its possible negative impact on the speakers' face, so that they can achieve their goals. As a methodological consequence, such a perspective entails micro-analysis approaches to interaction and to mediation, in order to understand the interconnection of these three moments of repair (Araújo e Sá & Melo-Pfeifer, 2007) and to analyse how the resolution of communicative problems is, at the same time, task-, form- and content-oriented. Our analysis, however, adopts a sociocultural perspective on mediation, as clarified in the next sub-section.

Mediation from a sociocultural perspective

Recently, the analytical stance based on the recognition of linguistic diversity as a source of communicative clashes is being challenged. Current research has evidenced the positive role different languages play in the co-construction of knowledge, particularly between expert and non-expert individuals. Analysing the relationships between actors, learning instruments, learning projects and learning outcomes, within specific learning contexts, these studies have revealed, for example, that linguistic and metalinguistic collaborative work nurtures the co-construction and conceptualization of linguistic and subject-specific knowledge (Cavalli, 2005; Gajo, 2013), in bi/multilingual settings (Bono & Melo-Pfeifer, 2011, 2014; Steffen, 2013). In the multilingual and intercultural learning settings observed (such as on-line meetings between collaborators of an international project and bilingual classes), language (as well as other semiotic resources) appear to be both instruments of mediation to understand conceptual constructs and a product of the mediation actions between social actors (whether they are considered experts or not). As observed in previous studies (Melo-Pfeifer, 2014), mediation, contrary to common, unidirectional assumptions mentioned above that see it as exercised by one individual, refers instead to a circular and dialectical process involving all the individuals engaged in an interactional process. In practice, all participants reconstruct and elaborate the tasks and the activities to be carried out in their own way, on the basis of their cognitive,

psychological and emotional resources. Thus, in a specific mediation intervention, a peer may be more effective than a more expert interlocutor (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991).

This new approach to mediation is associated with a sociocultural perspective of learning, influenced by Vygotsky, which gives the center of the stage to social interaction in individual development. Within this framework, mediation could be approached as a hypernym of 'scaffolding'[1], a metaphor introduced by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) and inspired by Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1986). Scaffolding refers to the tutorial process, or to the facilitating role played by experts in any learning process, i.e. "the means whereby an adult or 'expert' helps somebody who is less adult or less expert" (Wood, Bruner, & Ross 1976, p.89). However, from a broader perspective, ZPD and scaffolding emphasise the collaboration and shared nature of knowledge creation among different participants during interaction, independently of issues like status or expertise (see, for example, the study by Meirink, Imants, Meijer, & Verloop, 2010). From this viewpoint, the concept of 'Zone of Reflective Capacity' (Tinsley & Lebak, 2009), inspired by ZPD and scaffolding, and conceived as an analytical tool for interactions in formative situations, allows us to grasp the multidirectional nature of mediation. This concept refers to the potential for developing reflective capacity through interaction and collaborative work between individuals sharing the same objectives.

The 'Zone of Reflective Capacity' underscores the non-hierarchical status of participants, on the one hand, as well as the originality of each contribution in the conceptualization and development of the shared action or learning plan, on the other. Indeed, according to these authors, if all individuals possess an ensemble of cognitive, psychological and emotional resources, their interactional contributions should be seen as unique and distinctive. The change, therefore, is from individual expertise to collaborative work and collaborative achievements. In this perspective, learning and development are social activities where language plays a central role, since "there is a close relationship between the use of language as a cultural tool (in social interaction) and the use of language as a psychological tool (for organizing our own, individual thinking)" (Mercer, 2002, p.141). Thus, in professional contexts as well as in any other situation where knowledge and competence are acquired, the involvement in joint activities can generate new understandings which are then 'internalized'', fostering professional development and identity (Donato & MacCormick, 1994; Pinho, 2014; Pinho & Andrade, 2014; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). This sociocultural theory of mediation is also shared by Lantolf and Thorne (2006), for whom mediation is at the root of language development through the interaction between individual cognition and the social context, still within a Vygotskian tradition.

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1 We cannot, here, get into the debate about the concept or, better still, the scaffolding metaphor. It is useful, however, to recall that this term was met with great favour by teachers, because it makes explicit what teachers intuitively feel about their role as facilitators in educational interaction. On the other hand, a criticism has been raised by some reviewers (Miller, 1993) in relation to the indeterminacy of the concept. As Miller noticed, scaffolding has given rise to a proliferation of contradictory interpretations which has made it difficult to use in language and teacher education contexts. In particular, according to some authors (Lave & Wenger, 1991), there is the risk that scaffolding may be interpreted too restrictively and even opposed to how it was originally conceived.

This perspective points towards an actional approach to mediation (Puren, 2009). From this point of view, mediation depends on and generates a complex communicative situation, closely connected to the elements constituting the context (participants, roles and status, time and place, languages, communicative contract, communicative medium, etc.) and to the aims of the communicative situation. Therefore, the goals of mediation go beyond the avoidance or resolution of problems: mediation actions make new experience and knowledge accessible to all, through language and other means (e.g. pedagogical processes of simplification), add a shared and reflective dimension to the communicative task, ensure collaboration and team-support (Araújo e Sá, De Carlo & Melo-Pfeifer, 2013). Therefore, to be involved in mediation processes also means to engage in a process of self-discovery, questioning and change, in terms of self- and hetero-representations.

To summarize our position in this contribution, mediation will be considered from a sociocultural and socioconstructivist viewpoint, highlighting the situated and cultural "anchorage" of mediation (sociocultural perspective), and the role of interaction in learning and professional development (socioconstructivist perspective), and understood as "any procedure, arrangement or action designed to reduce the distance between two (or more) poles of otherness" (Panthier & North, 2015, p.1). Thus, mediation is defined as a process of co-construction and achievement (Araújo e Sá, De Carlo & Melo-Pfeifer, 2013, p.3) which values and highlights the social origins of education and teaching. Hence, the mediator "facilitates access to knowledge, the grasping of concepts, the reduction of tensions, building bridges towards the new, the other" (ibidem).

Mediation as a heuristic tool in this contribution

Following this definition and the review of the literature presented above, two types of mediation can be distinguished: a cognitive mediation aimed at approximating subjects and 'savoirs' or 'know-how', and a relational mediation aimed at approaching interlocutors affectively and socially (cf. North & Piccardo, 2016). It should be noticed that such a definition and the proposed typology are based on a common underlying principle: mediation is called upon to reduce distance between persons, between persons and objects, or between persons and environment. This distance, we must add, can be real, perceived or expected; the role of mediation would thus be "to establish and maintain the contact, to facilitate the rapprochement or the conciliation between Others" (Coste, 2014, p.79, authors' translation).

This theoretical overview will help us analyse how mediation processes are carried out and accomplished within the specific environment characterizing on-line multilingual interaction between professional adults: firstly, even though language diversity is not thematised in this kind of interaction, since it is implicit and accepted as a challenge in the communicative contract, we must recognize that the multiple linguistic and cultural resources deployed by the participants can be a potential source of incomprehension or misunderstandings; secondly, we have to point out that on-line interaction requires particular attention to the maintenance of social bonds; finally, we can observe that in this kind of exchanges the social responsibility of co-constructing experience, knowledge and professional know-how is distributed among all the participants, both teacher-trainees and tutors.

Empirical study

In the framework outlined above, and applied to language teacher education scenarios, mediation is understood as a co-construction, which values and highlights the social nature of learning and teaching. This process is made possible through individual engagement: each participant engages as a facilitator, i.e., someone who tries to reduce the distance between participants or between any participant and a given concept, task or know-how. In the following empirical section, we will use this theoretical overview to analyse the communicative practices of mediation in a teacher education platform. The platform, its scenario and tools are presented below.

The Galapro platform: 'Education of educators for intercomprehension in Romance Languages'

Our empirical study analyses an on-line session of the Galapro platform[2], a teacher education environment designed to discuss and develop intercomprehension theories and practices among teachers of romance languages (RL) (see Araújo e Sà, De Carlo & Melo-Pfeifer, 2010b, for a description). Figure 1 shows how this formative scenario was visually conceived:

Figure 1. Homepage of Galapro's platform

2   **GALAPRO** (*Formation de Formateurs à l'Intercompréhension en Langues*, 2008-2009) is a European Project coordinated by the University of Aveiro (Portugal) that has given rise to a platform focusing on online teacher training to the key principles of intercomprehension.

In the left section, a vertical column representing the working phases can be permanently seen, situating the participants temporally in the workflow. The central part of the virtual environment, an interconnected building, represents the different working and communicative spaces available in the platform. Participants in the Galapro plataform have several tools at their disposal: e-mail, chat, discussion forums, and wikis.

The Galapro platform aims to develop a collaborative educational setting based on co-reflection and co-action. Its main goal is to develop Intercomprehension teaching abilities through the practice of Intercomprehension (namely, through multilingual interaction). It was conceived along two axes: i) education in didactics of intercomprehension through the practice of intercomprehension; and ii) construction of plurilingual on-line communities through collaborative learning and teaching in intercomprehension. Intercomprehension will be here understood as an interactional process and product allowing speakers from different languages to communicate resorting to their linguistic and other semiotic resources, without necessarily making use of a single common language (see Araújo e Sá, De Carlo & Melo-Pfeifer, 2010a), for a definition). The linguistic contract implies that each participant should use one of their 'reference languages'[3] and try to understand the language(s) of the other participants. Nevertheless, as reported in several studies (e.g., Bono & Melo-Pfeifer, 2008), this restricted linguistic contract is often violated by participants who experiment with their productive abilities in other languages. This multilingual communication is facilitated by the interlinguistic proximity of RL, as well as by the speakers' ability to perceive linguistic similarities and use them, both to understand the other languages and adapt their 'reference language' in order to make it more understandable to interlocutors.

The registration for a formative session is done online, through the platform address. Participants are usually (foreign language) students at the universities that launched the platform. However, other modalities are possible: once the opening of a new session is made public, teachers around the globe may participate (see next section). Teachers work under the guidance of teacher trainers (called tutors on the Galapro platform) from different European and Latin-American countries. Each formative session evolves over 5 stages (see Table 1): a preliminary step (phase 0) where individuals, organized in local teams (IG - institutional group), complete their professional and linguistic profiles, meet the other participants on the platform, and discover the principles and objectives of the session. During phase 1, participants choose a theme to be developed according to their needs and create remote multilingual work groups (WG). These groups then define their work plan (phase 2) and implement it (phase 3), using the tools and resources of the platform. Phase 4 is the moment of assessment and (self-, co- and hetero-) evaluation of both the products and the work process. Throughout the sessions, a team of tutors (T) first animates their local groups (IG - institutional group) and then follows the activity of a WG. The tutors are assigned to the WG according to their specific competences related to the topics chosen by the participants in phase 2.

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3 Since there is a growing discussion on the distinction between Mother Tongue, Second, Third or Foreign Language, we used the term 'reference language' to refer to the supposed most-used language by the participant, during plurilingual interaction.

Table 1 summarizes the five work phases.

Table 1. Galapro's work phases

Phases	Duration	Activity	Description
Preliminary phase	One week	Preparation for the Galapro formative session (IG)	- First contact with participants in the session; - First contact with intercomprehension as discourse and practice; - Discovery of Galapro (principles, aims, tools, platform, etc.) and identification of educational needs and issues.
1. Our questions and our problems	Two weeks	Constitution of Work Groups (WG)	- Discussion about the educational needs and issues identified in the previous phase; - Setting up of plurilingual WG according to the themes discussed.
2. Educate oneself to educate	Two weeks	Definition of a work plan	- Definition of the work topic and of the final product to be delivered by the WG; - Elaboration of a work plan including methodology, organisation of participants and evaluation.
3. In training/ education	Four weeks	Development of the work plan	- Development of the work plan in view of the elaboration of the final product.
4. Evaluation and balance	Two weeks	Evaluation of the functioning and final products of the WG	- Validation and publication on the platform of the WG final products; - Self-assessment, hetero- and co-evaluation of the products of each WG; - Final account of the dynamics and activities developed during the session.

Data collection and methodology

The session we will be studying started in October 2011 and finished in January 2012, involving 191 participants (167 active trainees[4] and 24 tutors), from 12 countries (in Europe and Latin America). The languages allocated in the communicative contract were the RL of

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4   An 'active trainee' is a teacher that takes part in the session from the beginning until the end. They complete the tasks of each phase and participate in the elaboration of the final work of their group.

the participants: Catalan, French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian and Spanish. The session participants were language teachers and language teacher trainees; their motivations for participating were quite heterogeneous: for some of them it was due to it being included in an institutional programme and including a final assessment, others were motivated by purely personal interest. We collected all the interactions produced in the discussion forums during the first phase of the session which took place between 5th October and 23rd December 2011. Table 2 presents the nine plurilingual institutional groups.

Table 2. Participating teams

Name of the institutional group	Country	Number of participants		Total
		Tutors	Trainees	
Equipe de Cassino	Italy	6	14	20
Equipe de Grenoble M2 DLR and DFLR	France	3	24	27
Equipe de Lyon-Córdoba	France and Argentina	1	5	6
Equipo de Madrid	Spain	2	27	29
GI de Natal	Brazil	2	26	28
GI professores de Soure	Portugal	2	10	12
Gi tout à distance	(different nationalities)	4	17	21
Instituto Camões	Portugal	1	39	40
TICOM Barcelone	Spain	3	5	8
TOTAL		24	167	191

Table 3 summarizes the number of messages produced in the general discussion forums in each phase of the collaborative work, with the interventions of all participants. It should be noted that during phases two and three, collaborative work occurs within each work group and in each group's specific forums. This explains why the number of messages in the general forums during those phases is much smaller.

Table 3. Messages produced in each phase (general discussion forums)

Work Phase	Number of messages
Preliminary phase	166
1. Our questions and our problems	1065
2. Educate oneself to educate	22
3. In training/education	93
4. Evaluation and balance	527
Total number of messages	1873

In our contribution, we will consider one forum from the first phase ('Preliminary phase'). In this phase, two discussion forums were opened: "Benvindos a Galapro / Welcome to Galapro" and "A aventura está a começar... O que esperam desta sessão? / The adventure is starting… What do you expect from this session?". Only the second one will be analysed here. This forum was open between 13th and 31st October 2011, and 50 messages were produced by 26 participants (including 7 tutors). The messages were written in four different RL (French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish), although most were in Portuguese, due to the origins and composition of the groups. As was shown in Table 2, there were 3 teams coming from Portuguese-speaking countries: 'GI de Natal' (Brazil), 'Professores de Soure' (Portugal) and 'Instituto Camões' (which included a dispersed group of teachers of Portuguese as Foreign and Heritage Language, under the auspices of the Camões Institute for Language and Cooperation). The criterion for the selection of this discussion forum was that it was addressed to all participants and the theme was explicit enough to have a conversational structure concerning representations and expectations of the formative session. We considered the first discussion forum from the preliminary phase ('Welcome to Galapro') too unspecific to make a discourse and interactional analysis, while the other discussion forums in the central phases of the session focused on too specific interests or perspectives of the participants.

The first message on the discussion forum under analysis was written by a tutor (in Portuguese), who explicitly elicited all participants to share their motivations and expectations:

> (from Portuguese) Before starting the session, it would be interesting to share our expectations in respect to this experience, the reasons that led us to sign up ... So: why are we all here, on this platform, now, in this session? This question can be a starting point for this reflection and the sharing of ideas.

For methodological reasons, in order to establish a research path based on the micro-analysis of the communicative exchanges, in this specific communicative situation (pluri/multilingual[5] and on-line, multicultural and profession-oriented), the following questions were formulated to meet our context and its aims (recall Introduction): Through which communicative behaviours is it possible to identify actions of mediation by the participants? Which roles and dynamics can be linked to mediation, beyond linguistic problems or communicative clashes? How does mediation contribute to the co-construction of a common professional space in a multilingual and multicultural environment?

The choice of interactional analysis as our analytical tool aimed at understanding the functioning of discursive mediation going on in this setting, starting from the assumption that, within workgroups, cognition – as well subjectivity, intentions and capabilities – is not located "in the head of a lone subject but in the orderly production and recognizability of actions as they are designed, dealt with and, if necessary, repaired by participants" (Mondada, 2006, p.118). Such a perspective, consistent with the theoretical perspective adopted to define mediation,

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5   We consider the session to be multilingual because the different teams use different reference languages (usually the national language of the group) and, at the same time, also plurilingual, because each participant has an individual linguistic repertoire.

also implies that 'intersubjectivity', 'cognitive capabilities', 'understanding' and 'intention' are interactional accomplishments (idem, p.119).

In the next section, we will present and discuss some examples of the embodiment of mediation in the (intercultural and multilingual/plurilingual) interactions aiming at co-constructing professional knowledge and supporting professional development. This objective is at the core of a community of practice's activity, especially in multilingual teacher education settings, where communicative and professional cultures can be very different and have to be understood and shared. However, as pointed out in the *CEFR. Companion Volume* (2018: p.175), "it is virtually impossible to undertake cognitive mediation without taking account of the relational issues concerned. Real communication requires a holistic integration of both aspects." The following examples actually show how cognitive and affective dimensions are closely linked.

The discursive mediation practices

Mediation and the building of a shared professional knowledge

As stated before, regarding the multilingual nature of Galapro sessions, linguistic diversity is accepted as a basic assumption by participants. Teachers, trainee teachers and tutors engage in interactions where they foresee the construction of a shared teaching culture focusing on: i) professional practices and professional profiles; ii) integration of new pedagogical constructs, such as intercomprehension, in language education; iii) motivation for participating in the session and its expected impact on their professional development. By strictly following the above-mentioned communicative contract, a succession of interconnected and multilingual messages about these topics took place. Table 4 illustrates the linguistic sequence of the messages, clearly dominated by Portuguese-speaking participants[6]:

Table 4. Linguistic sequence of the discussion forum[7]

1-FR	2- PT	3-PT	4-ES	5- IT	6-PT	7-PT	8-PT	9-PT	10-PT
11-PT	12-PT	13-PT	14-PT	15- IT	16-ES	17-PT	18-PT	19- FR	20-PT
21-PT	22-PT	23-PT	24-PT	25-PT	26-PT	27-PT	28-PT	29-PT	30-PT
31-FR	32-PT	33-PT	34-PT	35-PT	36-PT	37-PT	38-PT	39-PT	40-PT
41-PT	42-PT	43-PT	44-PT	45-ES	46-PT	47-PT	48-PT	49-PT	50-ES

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6   The large presence of Portuguese-speaking participants is due to the fact that this session was included in the continuous education offer of *Instituto Camões*, which is the institute responsible for teaching and learning Portuguese abroad. Despite this fact, it is possible to observe the multilingual nature of communication between participants.

7   Key to abbreviations: ES – Spanish, FR – French, IT – Italian, PT – Portuguese.

A sort of supranational conception of what it means to be (and to become) a language teacher emerges in the participants' discourse, visible in the will to negotiate a social link: beginning with their personal feelings and beliefs, as a starting point to construct a community of practice, the participants describe the professional contexts in which they operate, showing that they understand their professional thinking as being anchored in the contexts and circumstances it developed.

The first example[8], from a Brazilian trainee, illustrates the motivations to participate in a Galapro session and this aspiring teacher explains the potentiality she sees in using Intercomprehension in Mother Tongue education.

Ex. 1 (Teacher trainee)	(From Portuguese) Hello everybody. I am also starting to learn about intercomprehension and what I hope for, at the moment, is to get in tune with what is being done here, i.e., to get to communicate and understand other participants. To start: I think of how intercomprehension can help me in the classroom, because I am a Mother Tongue teacher and so it is my first thought how to engage students with new possibilities of text comprehension, namely of literary texts, which are universal.

The second example, written by a teacher working under the Camões Institute and teaching Portuguese in a trilingual context – Luxemburg –, demonstrates some of the sociolinguistic motivations that underlie their participation in Galapro. The teacher hopes to grasp the pedagogical utility of intercomprehension as a possibility to integrate all languages present in the classroom and as a pedagogical tool to build bridges across the different languages present in the curriculum.

Ex. 2 (Teacher trainee)	(From Portuguese) Hi everybody. I'm participating in this teacher education session because it fits the reality that we, Portuguese teachers, live here. I.e., we live and work in a country with three official languages as well as a trilingual school system (Luxembourgish as a mother and national language, German as medium of instruction and French as a first foreign language), all three languages from the early years. This is just the school system: the reality is quite different. Almost half of the population is foreign (48%), and this means that half of the schoolchildren do not have Luxemburgish as a mother tongue! So, this situation creates a lot of difficulties, both for students and teachers. Facing this reality, I hope this session will offer me a better understanding on how much the knowledge of several foreign languages can help the development of the mother tongue and of the other languages. [...]

Example 2 also highlights the social justice aspirations attached to intercomprehension as a pedagogical principle: it may offer the potential of favouring the integration of foreign students that will, furthermore, be visiting a trilingual school system from a (perceived as) disadvantaged position.

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8   All examples were translated into English by the authors.

Through these explanations, participants make explicit their motivations for participating in the formative session, such as projection of a future professional path they think will be favoured by contacts with this community, where they are personally and professionally investing. A first step of cognitive mediation action is consequently put in place here, related to the fact that participants provide and elicit information about the contexts in which they are working, on the one hand, and about the professional constraints these contexts generate, on the other.

Supporting professional development

In our corpus, as we have just seen, mediation involves issues related to professional knowledge and development and is normally elicited to serve that purpose (goal-oriented). From this perspective, mediation plays the role of scaffolding (as already mentioned), and is here applied to professional development. Examples 3 and 4, produced by tutors, illustrate this point:

Ex. 3 (Tutor)	(From Italian) Sorry, I don't want to suppress the discussion and everyone's opinions, but it seems to me that Cl. raises an important question: WHAT FIELD ARE WE LOOKING TO WORK ON? [...] Do we all agree on this or do we want to do other things?
Ex. 4 (Tutor)	(From Portuguese) I believe that your participation in the work groups in the next steps will be an experience you will never forget. You will take it with you for the rest of your life, not only professional, but mostly personal. Stay with us.

These messages exemplify two roles of tutoring related with mediation: in the first, the tutor resumes and reformulates trainees' previous comments and discussion, making sure that their own subsequent proposals will be understood and accepted by trainees; in the second example, the tutor's intervention focuses on affective bonds, encouraging participation in order to avoid discouragement and dropping-out in the platform[9]. In the first case, the tutor intends to foster the group's interaction and collaborative work by focusing on salient and common positions and attitudes towards task accomplishment. In the second case, the tutor tries to stimulate the participants' affective involvement to promote their participation and engagement. The construction of a social link that favours the development and maintenance of this community of practice, specifically by supporting the transition from this preliminary phase to the next ones (actual group work), is clearly one of the goals of these mediation activities.

In both cases, tutors become mediators relying on their expertise and previous experiences, reducing the affective and cognitive distance between participants and task (cf. cognitive mediation and relational mediation – North & Piccardo, 2016). So, the examples above show that, as a support for professional development, mediation ensures that workflow is attractive, adequate and justified to ensure participants' continued engagement.

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9   It should be noticed that the transition between phase one and two is usually perceived as quite hard, being mostly concentrated on trainees' efforts and work. It is a delicate moment for the teacher education session, as many participants feel discouraged and abandon it or do not actively participate in the exchanges.

As stated previously, in this collaborative work environment, the mediation function is performed by different actors with different statuses: tutors and trainees participating in the session. On some issues, both may feel mobilized to answer or comment on a given message, with the purpose of ensuring mutual professional support and organizing the session's activities, such as in this sequence:

Ex. 5 Proposition and request (Trainee teacher)	(From Portuguese) Well done, D. I think we can divide the tasks, as we have just presented two Spanish questionnaires. Now, which version of the short-story are we going to work with the students?
Ex. 6 Proposition and encouragement (Tutor)	(From Portuguese) I suggest that you check the library and read articles on the inclusion of intercomprehension in schools. It might help you in building up a future master's study, who knows?

In these contributions, two different linguistic acts are expressed: encouragement and proposal, the latter being usually followed by a question, asking for (or opening up space to) the opinion of the interlocutor. This opened space mitigates the sense of the opinion expressed by the speaker and could be seen as a 'facework' strategy, allowing different parties to keep the 'face' in case of conflictual perspectives on the subject. Whilst this behaviour could be attributed to a form of *netiquette,* in fact it meets the need to balance instrumental and emotional mediation in on-line communication.

Mediation also has a dimension of regulating the communicative context (ex. 7), since it ensures linguistic, cultural and professional diversity during the session, necessary to accomplish the goal of the formative path: "development of Intercomprehension teaching abilities through the practice of Intercomprehension".

Ex. 7 (Trainee teacher)	(From Spanish) I am very happy to see that everyone has different experiences with intercomprehension and that it is a good way to learn from others and to share our language and our culture.

Note, in examples 8 and 9 below, how diversity is considered by participants as a potential source of richness and professional development, rather than trouble or difficulty: diversity is here related to multiplicity of professional experiences and to the complexity of the base-concept of the formative session (Intercomprehension).

Ex. 8 Request/wish (Trainee teacher)	(From Portuguese) Hello everyone, I'm also starting in intercomprehension. What I hope at the moment is to get in tune with what is done here, namely to manage to communicate and understand others.
Ex. 9 Answer to 8 (Tutor)	(From Portuguese) Very good, C. Note that this is probably the main goal of intercomprehension, to improve communication without anyone having to necessarily submit to the language of the other; after all, each language has its own value and very rich cultural aspects and which cannot – and never will – be universalized.

In the excerpts shown above (from 5 to 9), all the participants, both teacher trainees and tutors, play the role of mediator in some way: encouraging, clarifying or giving suggestions. From this perspective, mediation is also a discursive strategy to achieve shared knowledge, fostering collaborative work and, thus, professional development.

We can consequently observe that, in this multilingual environment, given the physical, linguistic, professional and cultural distance of participants, mediation – namely in its cognitive dimension – is even more necessary than in other communicative contexts. In our corpus, mediation takes the form of either a cultural tool in social interaction (as in examples 1 and 2), an epistemic tool for supporting professional development (examples 3 to 9), and clarifying a theoretical concept (example 9), or an affective and social tool for ensuring affective engagement (most visible in example 4.).

Conclusions

In the present paper, we intended on the one hand to reinterpret the concept of mediation in the foreign language teaching educational landscape, and, on the other, to reframe it in a wider perspective, in order to broaden its empirical utility and operability so as to apply it to on-line multilingual teacher education.

In the socio-constructivist and sociocultural approach adopted in the present study, learning and teacher education occurs through social activities, situated within a specific context. In the interactions analysed, participants mobilised their personal knowledge and skills but, at the same time, went beyond them, collaboratively exploiting a shared pool of competences and attitudes. In order to do so, as we have seen, participants mobilised their linguistic resources and the more effective tools in the on-line environment, to support learning activities. As constructors of professional relationships, the mediators helped build a professional space open to different professionals' experiences, expectations and paths. The mediators also played the role of engagement guarantors, supporting individual participation and collaborative work, facilitating social participation in the on-going collaborative work and ultimately in the life of the community. Let us add that, 'life of the community' refers "not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities" (Wenger, 1999, p.4).

Our study suggests the usefulness of going beyond an approach to mediation based merely on the analysis of communicative clashes and problem solving. This does not mean that those perspectives are not valuable, but rather that mediation, as a process of making meaning and intentions accessible by reducing distance, can be applied also to other aspects of communication, related to collaboration and co-construction of a professional environment (including relationship, engagement and sharing) in intercultural and multilingual settings. Indeed, we observed that all participants contribute to a socially, cognitively and emotionally appropriate working environment, through their knowledge, skills and attitudes, regardless of their initial roles.

The analysis of the dynamics of mediation in our particular setting highlights the pervasive impact of context on interaction: actors and their roles, languages and shared linguistic

resources, aims and goals of the communication, communicative setting, and communicative artefacts. In the communicative scenario described, clashes and problems tend to be absent: either they are avoided by participants (or solved aforehand) or they are rapidly solved. Several facts can explain this, such as the fact that participants had chosen the teacher education program, and participated in the platform out of their own curiosity. Furthermore, a common professional goal seems to be shared by participants and, finally, on-line communication encourages greater control in terms of expressing disagreement, particularly in a context where the communicative contract is clear and firm. Finally, the fact that the participants' reference language was allowed, made it easier to express divergent opinions and thoughts.

In such a particular context, it is easy to observe other functions of mediation beyond problem solving. Our analysis supports a socio-constructive approach to mediation, as co-constructed, locally situated, and embodied in professional practices and discourses. It is neither a stable construct nor an instrumental skill: it is based on individual cognition, but it is also a dynamic co-construction dependent upon time, space and other actors. During the exchanges on the Galapro platform, participants from different cultural and linguistic contexts engaged in mediation practices to ensure relational harmony and achieve the goals and tasks set out in the formative scenario. Their contributions can be registered as the mediation activity described in the *CEFR. Volume Companion* (2018: p.117): *Mediating concepts*). The analysis evidenced different functions of the discursive behaviour of both tutors and trainees, particularly in relation to: expressing one's own motivation to participate and collaborate in the session; mutual encouragement to maintain the active involvement of the participants; questioning, in order to provoke and stimulate reflection; conceptual support to structure exchanges and summarizing the discussion. These dialogical activities facilitated horizontal communication and allowed the participants to share knowledge, clarify doubts, encourage self-expression and others' participation.

Acknowledgments

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