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THE SPEAKING ACTIVTIES IN AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOK

TRABALHO FINAL DE GRADUAÇÃO

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Abstract

This work is based on an English language textbook. The choice to analyze an English textbook is justified by the fact that this material is used in most classes by teachers and students in the Brazilian context. This analysis, which is based on activities that involve the speaking skill, is connected with observations of lessons in the discipline of supervised internship in English, when it was observed some student's difficulty to develop conversations in English language. Therefore, the objective of this work is to analyze speaking activities found in the book *alive! 6* (MENEZES et al., 2012), which belongs to the Programa Nacional do Livro Didático (PNLD) in 2014, 2015 and 2016. The first step of the analysis consisted in identifying all speaking activities found in the textbook. This process was carried out to separate the activities that involve speaking from other specific skills such as writing, for example. In the following step, the activities were divided into four categories: drills, dialogue adaptation, singing activities and speaking practice. The results indicate that activities which are explicitly of speaking only represent 12.3% of all activities in the textbook. The analysis also revealed that the activities of drills, singing activities and speaking practice promote repetition of words and sentences, representing 61% of total speaking activities found in the textbook, which makes the practice of communication in English mechanized and difficult to be put into practice in a real context of speech in the English language. Therefore, the study indicates that the speaking activities are insufficient to develop oral communication in English when using exclusively this textbook.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, textbooks are used as teaching materials in English teaching classes in Brazilian schools (both Elementary and High schools) and frequently they represent the only source of activities. Thus, rather than using it as one of the tools, textbooks become the unique resource in the teaching and learning processes. Therefore, textbooks are one of the most adopted tools in English teaching classrooms in Brazil.

More precisely, textbooks are a set of concepts, exercises and ideas of selected topics or themes. It is usually written by one author or a group of authors who usually are experts in a specific field, such as language teachers and linguists. The majority of textbooks are accompanied by teacher's guides, which provide instructions of how to improve classes, complementary and alternative activities and support materials.

The object of analysis of this study is an English teaching textbook. The reasons why this topic was chosen as an object of analysis are presented as follows. Firstly, textbooks are very common in the Brazilian educational scenario. Secondly, the selection of an English teaching textbook is justified by the fact that the "textbooks could not be left out of the analysis, becoming a critical questioning of a foreign languages teacher" (TICKS, 2005, p. 17). Thus, as a trainee teacher of Padre Caetano Elementary School, I choose to analyze an English teaching textbook focusing on the speaking skill. In contrast to the other skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing), I observed few attempts of speaking in English language classes. In addition, the personal choice of analyzing speaking activities is justified by the fact that, when we analyze the speaking skill in terms of how these exercises are planned and organized, it can help to understand how to teach students to speak in English in a globalized and multi-cultural world. Therefore, as an English language undergraduate student and a trainee teacher, I consider the study of textbook as of crucial importance. In addition, *Alive! 6 – Língua Estrangeira Moderna*, the chosen book for this analysis, is used as educational basis of second language students in many schools in Brazil, and therefore it requires a special attention and an analysis of how this book is constituted.

The decision to analyze speaking activities in English textbooks comes from my personal resistance to use only textbooks in classes and my interest to investigate how these materials are designed. I also think textbooks have a tendency to become exceeded, irrelevant or indifferent to students quite quickly and topics like student's life, love, artists or famous people, music, friendship and so on often seem stereotypical topics to present to children and teenagers.

The selected textbook is distributed by the school to students and they can take the book home and bring it to English class. However, the activities explored in class focus mostly on writing and reading. Listening and speaking are almost inexistent in this environment. Therefore, there is a condition of imbalance among the four skills in the classes and several students present difficulty to improve their fluency in English language.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how speaking activities of a specific textbook are designed and to what extent they promote speaking in English teaching classroom. The study will cover all speaking activities of the textbook. Moreover, the analysis will try to answer how the speaking activities are organized, that is, classified them into categories and it will try to explain the purpose of these activities.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 English Language and textbooks

The relevance of exploring English Language in school is determinant in nowadays to interact with a multicultural world. According to Graddol (1997, p. 4), English seems to have been adopted as the language of globalization these days as the language of global culture and international economy. Therefore, there is more than one simple factor why studying English is so important nowadays, such as economic factor, language of computer, businesses and so on. The importance of English Language is also emphasized by Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais:

> O caso típico é o papel representado pelo inglês, em função do poder e da influência da economia norte-americana. Essa influência cresceu ao longo deste século, principalmente a partir da Segunda Guerra Mundial, e atingiu seu apogeu na chamada sociedade globalizada e de alto nível tecnológico, em que alguns indivíduos vivem neste final do século. O inglês, hoje, é a língua mais usada no mundo dos negócios, e em alguns países, como Holanda, Suécia e Finlândia, seu domínio é praticamente universal nas universidades. É possível antever que, no futuro, outras línguas desempenhem esse papel (BRASIL,1998, p. 23).

Thereby, in order to teach English language in elementary and high school, most teachers adopt textbooks as support material. In addition, Brazil has a program named PNLD (Programa Nacional do Livro Didático) which consists in supporting the teacher's pedagogical work by distributing textbooks to elementary and high schools. However, the classes exclusively based on textbooks can be problematic because sometimes teachers think textbooks cannot be changed or modified to their school context, as Souza (1995) discuss:

> Livros didáticos "demonstram passo a passo" como o ensino deve ser processado. Nesse contexto, o livro torna-se intocável e inquestionável. Tem "vida própria" e "controla" o processo de ensino-aprendizagem. Por conseguinte, os professores acreditam que "...sua hierarquia não deve ser rompida, sob pena de provocar 'lacunas' na formação do aluno"" (SOUZA, 1995, p. 120).

Textbooks are not just relevant in classes as support materials to students and teachers, but it also brings new social topics to the classes, as family, school context and bullying. Thus, textbooks and teachers are relevant to explore in the school context.

2.2 Speaking skill

Another important aspect in this analysis is the speaking skill. There are many daily life situations where people need to speak, for example: a face-to-face conversation, communicating through the phone, asking and answering questions, meetings their friends. People use language according to their purpose and it seems important to be a listener and a speaker for effective communication (HARMER, 2007 p. 46).

The speaking practice activities performed in classes, during my internship at Instituto Padre Caetano, were virtually inexistent. In my analysis, two main factors are relevant at this point: the difficult in practice the communication and the purpose of exercises. For example, in the didactic book there are few activities involving communication between two or more students, that is, speaking activities are supposed to develop a real and contextual conversation between students. According to Rivers (1966, p. 196), "speaking does not itself constitute communication unless what is said is comprehended by another person. Teaching the comprehension of spoken speech is therefore a primary importance of the communication aim is to be reached".

Another difficulty observed during the classes and related to speak is connected to the interaction between the speakers. The students argue how was difficult to establish some dialogue based on textbook activities, and these activities, in general, do not provide a context of use English language as a real conversation topic. According to Bailey and Savage (1994, p.6) speaking is an "activity requiring the integration of many subsystems…all these factors combine to make speaking a second or foreign language a formidable task for language learners. yet for many people, speaking is seen as the central skill".

In terms of quantity, speaking activities are also in minor quantity than reading and writing activities in this textbook and in the analysed classes. Therefore, there is an inequity between language skills, which results in a certain difficulty to explore speaking activities. According to Bueno, Madrid and McLaren (2006, p.321), speaking is one of the most difficult skills language learners have to face. In spite of this, it has traditionally been forced into the background while we, English teachers, have spent all our classroom time trying to teach our students how to write, to read and sometimes even to listen in a second language, because grammar has a long-written tradition.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Corpus

In this paper, I analyzed the English Textbook *alive! 6 – Língua Estrangeira Moderna* written by Vera Menezes, Katia Tavares, Junia Braga and Claudio Franco and published by Editora Anzol in 2012. This textbook is distributed in Brazil by the Ministério da Educação (MEC) and it is one of the textbooks of the Programa Nacional do Livro Didático (PNLD). In PNLD (2014, 2015 and 2016), books are submitted to an evaluative process of several aspects, such as their quality, content and relevance, and they can be chosen by teachers of public schools across the country.

Figure 1–The cover of the textbook from the collection *alive!*
Source: Menezes et al. (2012)

This textbook is divided into four main parts and each part contains a specific topic:

Chart 1 - Parts of the textbook

PART 1	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4
People and school	*Family and home*	*Eating and living*	*Acting in the world*
Activities related to occupation, nationality, personal information, greetings, school objects names, alphabet, colors and classroom language.	Activities related to family members, introducing people, and how to tell the time and how to describe places.	Activities related to health, daily habits, names of vegetables and fruits.	Activities related to parts of the body, clothes and accessories.
Unit 1: Who am I?	*Unit 3*: We are family	*Unit 5*: You are what you eat	*Unit 7:* Connections
Unit 2: My class	*Unit 4*: There is no place like home	*Unit 6:* It's just another day	*Unit 8:* Protesting and advising

Each unit is composed by nine sections:

Chart 2 – Sections of the textbook

SECTION	CONTENT
Let's start	Introduction to the main topic of the unit
Art corner	Activities related to artistic expressions, as painting, sculptures and photography
Let's read	Activities related to texts with different themes
Let's focus on language	Grammar section
Let's talk	Activities related to speaking and interaction in English language
Let's learn about	Vocabulary section
Let's listen	Activities related to different oral texts, such as interviews and dialogues
Let's sing	Activities related to music
Let's act with words	Activities related to writing in different textual genres by steps

Moreover, this textbook contains two additional parts entitled extra activities 1 and extra activities 2, a glossary section in which students may look for unknown words and a language reference section with a grammatical explanation, such as simple present and present continuous. At the end, there is a recommended bibliography section for students and a bibliography section.

3.2 Analysis

The first step of the analysis included a selection of all activities specifically related to speaking. In this textbook, the section entitled "Let's talk" does not include all speaking activities, therefore, it was necessary to search for them in all sections, units and parts of the didactic book, including the four parts (people and school, family and home, eating and living and acting in the world) and extra activities 1 and extra activities 2. In this last part, it was possible to find many speaking activities distributed in other sections, such as "Let's sing" and "Let's act with words". The first step was essential to locate in which parts the speaking activities were situated, and to quantify the total number of activities found. The initial idea was to search for keywords in the title of the activities, such as talk, listen or repeat, and analyze the activities' purposes based on the identification of the verbs. However, this search did not achieve the expected results, due to the fact that many activities present a previous contextualization of exercises and the speaking activities usually result in reading and writing activities.

The second step included the classification of all speaking activities that I found in the textbook, including all four parts of the book and two sections of extra activities. In this step, it was explained how the speaking activities could be classified in four different categories, according to the activity's purpose in a quantification process. This classification resulted in the following categories of speaking exercises: drills, singing, speaking practice and dialogue adaptation.

The third step included an analysis of the activities based on new literacies. Therefore, in this step, the focus was to discuss how the speaking activities found in the textbook could be readapted into new activities with new purposes or could be changed to new perspectives, adapting them to the student's context.

4. RESULTS

4.1 General Results

The first step of analysis revealed a total of 39 speaking activities in the textbook, covering 12% of activities, including all activities of the textbook (318 activities), such as reading and writing activities. This first "search" in the textbook helped to identify, in terms of a quantitative analysis, the huge difference between speaking activities and the others, such as writing and reading activities:

Figure 1 – Speaking x Writing Activities

Speaking Activities x Writing/Reading Activities

- 12% Speaking Activities
- 88% Writing/Reading Activities
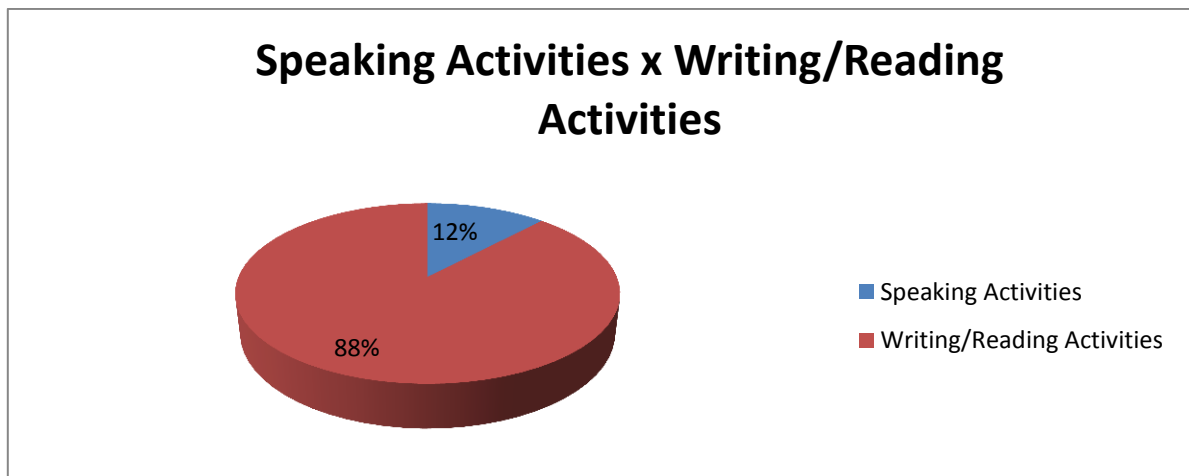
Moreover, this first step of analysis also revealed some difficulties to find the specific activity (in this case, speaking activities) according to the title of the section, that is, several speaking activities were found in another section, such as Art Corner… or Let's read and not just in "Let's Talk" section. For example, in Figure 2 the main topic of this part is called 'Art Corner'; however, in this part of the textbook the speaking activity (exercise number 3) is located in this section. Thus, although the textbook contains specific sections, the speaking activities can be found in another section.

Figure 2 – Art Corner Section (MENEZES et al., 2012: p. 111)

4.2 Categories of analysis

Figure 3 – Speaking activities divided into four categories of analysis
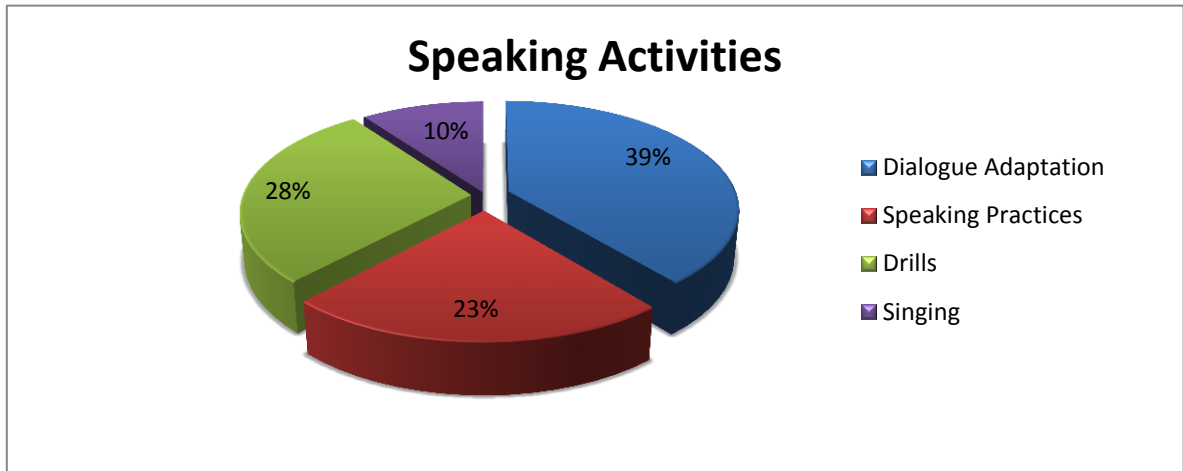
4.2.1 Drills

The purpose of these activities, in general terms, is to repeat isolated words according to the textbook to practice continuous pronunciation. In many cases, there are few and decontextualized words, because the purpose is to focus on learning how to pronounce English language correctly (see example 1). In this kind of activity, the student does not need to produce sentences or dialogues and share it with classmates or even change the words. This kind of activity is inefficient because the use of these words differs from real dialogues and turn the conversation into something very distant from the real context. Moreover, separated words without a context also do not work properly in terms of quantity, that is, word by word, becoming the English pronunciation slow and decontextualized. The repetition activities analysed in this textbook are accompanied by the CD-ROM and can be used to learn how to pronounce that specific word or to study at home. In this English textbook, 11 activities of drill were found.

Example 1:

"Listen and repeat. Notice the abbreviations of the months in bold"

(Menezes et al., 2012: p.37).

This activity of drills just emphasizes the pronunciation of the months. However, this is very distant from to establish a dialogue in English language or to get close to real conversation in a foreign language.
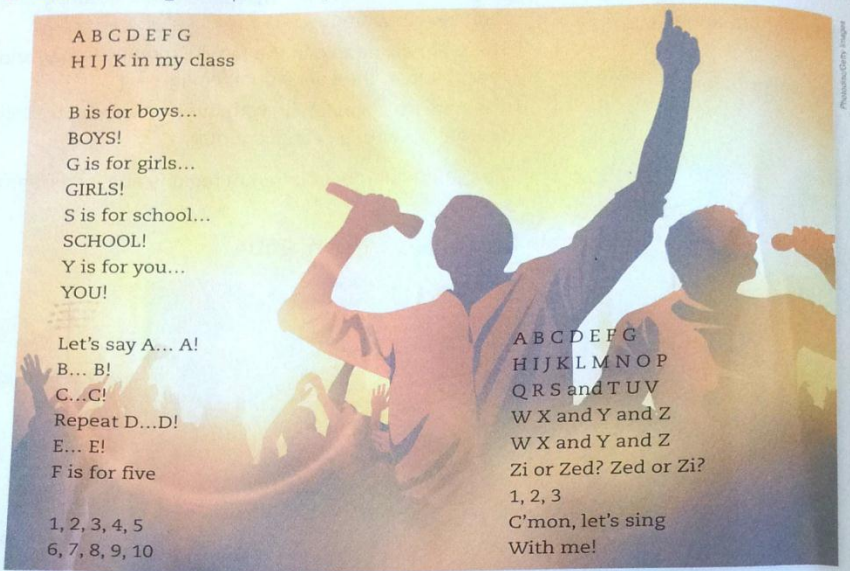
4.2.2 Singing

The purpose of these exercises is to listen to it according to the music and sing along. This kind of activities usually deals with different strategy purpose: entertainment plus learning. In general terms, this activity aims to improve the pronunciation while students sing and listen to the music simultaneously. Moreover, these activities are similar to the previous category (repetition) and it focuses on unusual expressions or sentences not used in a real conversation. In this English textbook, 4 activities of singing were found.

Example 2:

"Let's sing the alphabet rap!" (MENEZES et al.,2012: p.140).

Let's sing!

1. 🎧 49 Let's sing the alphabet rap!

A B C D E F G
H I J K in my class

B is for boys…
BOYS!
G is for girls…
GIRLS!
S is for school…
SCHOOL!
Y is for you…
YOU!

Let's say A… A!
B… B!
C…C!
Repeat D…D!
E… E!
F is for five

1, 2, 3, 4, 5
6, 7, 8, 9, 10

A B C D E F G
H I J K L M N O P
Q R S and T U V
W X and Y and Z
W X and Y and Z
Zi or Zed? Zed or Zi?
1, 2, 3
C'mon, let's sing
With me!

Singing activities can be similar to drills in this case, because the final purpose of these activities is to repeat according to the textbook.

4.2.3 Speaking Practice

The purpose of these activities is to speak according to the previous dialogue (provided by the textbook). It usually requires more than one student to practice the conversation. In addition, in this kind of exercise, the student does not need to produce new dialogues or sentences, since the dialogues are already provided by the textbook. In speaking practice activities, the purpose is interesting because it connects the student to another student, always speaking and exchanging ideas with each other. Moreover, the analysis revealed, in this kind of activity, a better contextualization of speaking compared to other categories, that is, there is a conversation and it is situated in daily aspects, as asking for someone's name and age, greetings and so on. However, the final purpose still remains similar to drills category in a few aspects, such as successive repetitions and

mechanized conversation. In this English textbook 9 activities of speaking practice were found.

Example 3:

"In pairs, practice conversation 1." (MENEZES et al.,2012: 13)

The speaking practice activities differ from drills and singing categories because in this case there is a previous dialogue provided by the textbook, resulting in a small conversation between the students.

4.2.4 Dialogues adaptation

The purpose of these activities is to adapt the dialogues provided in the textbook and to create a new dialogue. In these exercises, students can produce new dialogues with their classmates and at the same time improve their speaking skill, vocabulary and pronunciation. Furthermore, an important characteristic of this kind of activity is to use dialogues in a similar real conversation, in other words, students were immersed in a real (or next to reality) context and they can explore English language in a conversation by themselves.

Thereby, the objective is not just to explore the "correct" pronunciation, but also to promote creativity, new ideas, autonomy and social interaction and combine these aspects in a conversation. Dialogues adaptation are very good examples of how activities can combine several aspects of language, such as writing and reading and the use of these elements to produce a new way of learning, avoiding continuous repetition and decontextualized words.

Example 4

> "Imagine you are at the park, in a similar situation. Introduce two friends to another one. Adapt the script and practice the new conversation." (Menezes et al., 2012: p. 46)

3. Now, read the transcript of the dialog.

Desiree: Hi, Claire.
Claire: Hey.
Desiree: Hey.
Claire: Oh, okay. Hi, um... This is my husband, Phil.
Phil: Hi.
Claire: And that's my son, Luke, right there. This is...
Desiree: Desiree.
Claire: Desiree. Right. Sorry.

From: TV show *Modern Family*, season 1, episode 2.

a) Practice the conversation with your classmates.
b) Imagine you are at a park, in a similar situation. Introduce two friends to another one. Adapt the script and practice the new conversation.

Dialogues adaptations suggest students to produce the dialogue according with their own language knowledge and creativity.

4.3 Additional results

The classification of speaking activities in four categories of analysis is useful to identify the main purposes of these activities: to practice dialogue, to repeat isolated words, to sing and to adapt dialogues. However, by analyzing them in a detailed way, these categories of activities result in two major aspects as final objectives: repetition of linguistic structures and adaptation of exercises.

Drills, singing activities and speaking practices are different kinds of activities, but similar in the final purpose: repetition. For example, in drills, students will repeat decontextualized words, just like in singing activities, and in speaking practices, students will repeat short conversations provided by the textbook. Therefore, drills, singing activities and speaking practice still remain focused on repetition based on textbook words and with few moments of social interaction in student's context, because all words, sentences and expressions are already provided by the textbook. These three categories represent 61% of all speaking activities of the textbook.

These three categories discussed before (drills, singing activities and speaking practice) represent aspects related to old and traditional literacy as Kalantzis and Cope (2012, p. 16) discuss "the basics of old literacy learning involved elementary phonics to translate the sounds of speech into the symbolic images of writing, and reading as a process of decoding the meanings of written words. It focused on textual formalities such as 'correct' spelling and grammar". Thus, in a multicultural and globalized world, the old literacies as these speaking activities focused just on repetition of linguistic structures become exceed and do not attract students to practice the English language as dialogue simulator, they just spell the same words without a context. Communication is one of the most important factor in language and it is important that learners are able to realize differences in patterns of meaning from one context to another.

Another aspect to highlight related to speaking activities in this textbook is the evaluation criteria performed by this textbook in PNLD (highlighted in a red rectangle in the table 3 according with collection code number 27320COL44) in nine different (and specific) aspects

of criteria. Every criterion corresponds to a textbook element, such as text selection criteria or linguistic elements criteria. However, the focus on this analysis is in to explore the speaking activities in the textbook, so the main focus on this table is to analyze the aspects related to oral comprehension and oral production, both of them are highlighted in a red rectangle in Figure 4.

According to PNLD criteria, there are three base color to establish levels of qualification, the darkest color (▇) indicates a higher grade and the clearest color (▭) indicates a lower grade. Therefore, the aspects related to this analysis were evaluated in different levels.

Firstly, oral comprehension received a mid-term grade (▬) and oral production received the lowest grade of evaluation (▭). Thus, according to PNLD, the aspects related to speaking activities, that is, activities involving communication in English language were classified in lower grades, resulting in worst results in terms of quality.

Secondly, when compared to others aspects, oral comprehension and oral production are in lower quality then the others elements of the textbook, which can be confirmed not just by Figure 4, but also considering the quantity of activities involving repetition of decontextualized linguistic structures founded in the textbook alive! and the lack of activities connected to dialogue production. In addition, considering oral production criteria as essential to develop the communication between student's and language improvement, this criterion received by PNLD evaluation the worst grade across all areas of analysis. Consequently, this study demonstrates inequality between all skills of language (comprehension, writing , speaking and reading) in this textbook, and it results in a possible difficulty by the students to improve all skills of language, considering that most of classes are still based on this textbook.

Figure 4 – PNLD criteria to evaluate textbooks (BRASIL, 2013)

5. Concluding Remarks

In this study, I analyzed the speaking activities of the textbook alive! The purpose of this analysis was accomplished as it was possible to understand how speaking activities in this textbook are related to exploring the repetition of linguistic structures. Thus, the textbook analyzed provided few activities involving speaking skill and most of them includes repetition as main purpose. By the other side, in the dialogue adaptation activities promote to the students a better understating of how to communicate in a foreign language by creating their own dialogue and using it in their context. However, this kind of activity was found in minor quantity then others, such as drills and singing activities.

In order to improve the activities of repetition in the textbook and use it in a student's context, critical literacy approach can be suggested to enhance these speaking activities. According to Cervetti, Pardales, and Damico (2001, p. 5), "students of critical literacy approach textual meaning making as a process of construction, not exegesis; one imbues a text

with meaning rather than extracting meaning from it. More important, textual meaning is understood in the context of social, historic, and power relation, not solely as the product or intention of an author". Therefore, critical literacy works with social context, promoting a new kind of textual practice and it results in a critical thinking, that is, the students can interact with the text, not just writing or speaking, but also positioning themselves in their context of life and world.

Speaking activities in this textbook can be approached with critical literacy. For instance, the activity based on drills (see Example 1) could be modified by the teacher in another kind of activity, but keeping the same theme (in this case, the theme of this activity is the months of the year) as base of the activity. For example, instead of just listening and repeating, this kind of activity can establish questions to students involving months, such as: which month is your birthday? Which month does your school end? What months are cold in your country? Which month do you like best? Which months are the hardest to spell for you? And so on. This kind of activity promotes an interaction between students and, at the same time, brings learners close to their context.

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