TEACHING
CHANGES
LIVES
My name is Fátima Gonçalves and I've been teaching English since 1986.

I am a movie buff and when in 1989 I saw a film called “Dead Poets’ Society” it immediately occupied my top three list of films that most impressed me.

“Oh Captain, my Captain!” – who can forget this line?
I too wanted to be a Captain and in these 27 years I think I have mustered the ingredients necessary to make my classes successful...

- Sense of humor and laughter
- Respect
- Scientific knowledge

Guidance
These last years at the beginning of each class I show my high school students puns or jokes in English with two basic purposes:

- Learning English can be fun
- Making them aware of the rich subtleties that any language involves.
Last year I decided to take the classes out of the classroom and into the world. I traveled with my 11th grade students, studying to be Tourism professionals, to Ireland. During the months that preceded the field trip, they gathered information on all the places included in our visit: The Leprechaun Museum, The Jeanie Johnston, The Cliffs of Moher, Giant’s Causeway to mention just a few. Their script was seen and praised by two Irish University teachers which made the students feel really proud of their work.

Along with the script they had lesson guides with questions I had prepared to be answered at those places of interest.
Giant’s Causeway, World heritage Site since 1987 is situated on the northern coast of Ireland. This area is made up of more than 37,000 hexagonal basalt columns: some are about 10 metres high.

It is known in Irish as Clochán an Aifir or Clochán na bhFomhórac.

Legend

The Irish Giant Finn MacCool wanted to fight the Scot giant Benandonner, but there was no vessel big enough to take him across the sea. So, MacCool built a causeway with huge stone columns. Benandonner accepted the challenge and travelled through the causeway to Ireland. He was stronger and bigger than MacCool. As Finn MacCool’s wife realized that she decided to dress her husband like a baby. When Benandonner arrived and saw the baby he thought: “If the baby is this big, what will the father be like?!”. He ran back to Scotland and to make sure Finn MacCool wasn’t going to follow him he destroyed the road, leaving only the stones that now form Giant’s Causeway.

Hugo Moreira, Rui Ferrão
“My interest in the English language began in the 7th grade. I was a newcomer to a different school with new and different teachers. The English classes were interesting and became dynamic and with the relentless effort of our teacher Fátima Gonçalves I managed to overcome my difficulties. Every week she would motivate her students by giving us reasons to learn the most spoken language in the world.

So, I can only thank her for the foundations of what I learnt in her wonderful classes because this proved very effective when, on my third year in college, I went to Finland to study for three months, through the ERASMUS program.”

Filipa Lopes, 20, student at Coimbra University
“Adolescence is a very trying period for even the most balanced of kids. Where parents often fail, a good teacher might actually succeed, reaching the teenager, steering them back in the right direction, and maybe even spark an interest previously unbeknownst to them.

It was during that time that I first had classes with my English teacher Fátima Gonçalves. I had had many English teachers before her and even one after, most of them highly unimpressive, lacking both personality and teaching skills. She was the one that found the key to unlock my English potential, using a combination of humour, pleasant teaching rhythm (unlike the military style of some other teachers), giving her students just enough freedom for them to feel at ease without losing control of her class. She often organized debates between the students to help them improve their command of the English language in real conversations while at the same time give them the opportunity to express themselves.

These little details and experiences helped to build up my confidence and I felt ready to use this extra language not only in the safe confines of my school but also in the real world. A few years later I embarked on an adventure, deciding to go study abroad, seeking the thrill of experiencing a different world and the cultural shock that it entails, relying confidently on my English skills to handle it.

How has this changed my life? Well, I ended up staying in that foreign country, where I own two companies, using English as my primary language, doing a job that takes me all over the world, meeting interesting people from all kinds of different backgrounds, I sit down with venture capitalists confidently knowing that my level of English will match theirs, and I’ve even become the official proofreader of an American novelist. My life would probably be a lot different had I not crossed paths with my high school English teacher Fátima Gonçalves.”
“In a time and age when education in Portugal took a basic approach to teaching English, when you could have all the answers and just stand by your exercise book I was one of the lucky ones taught to think outside the box and dare to think in English.

To learn about American and British history, culture and music in my teen years changed my thought process for the better and helped me in my academic future.

In my first year of college I went with a couple of friends on a field trip to a foreign cinema festival, and I learned that “In the name of the Father” was featured in the film screening. All my colleagues were relieved to know the film had subtitles. As for me I was a bit disappointed, as my classmates and I, while at high school, had watched the film in our English class with no subtitles having to deal with all the different accents: a perfect lesson in listening and phonetics.”

“I firmly believe that great teachers build not only our knowledge but also our resilience and problem solving skills. A little bit of my personality and notion of life comes from all that time spent learning, in conversations, feeling that I was worthy of her time, her knowledge, her notion of the world. I truly value the opportunity to have studied in such a rich and diverse environment.”

Marisa Madeira, 30, translator in Beijing
"Teaching changes lives" It sure does! It changed mine! I already loved learning English at school but when I met my former English teacher Fátima Gonçalves, English classes turned from boring to fantastic! She taught English with such passion that I knew that I wanted to study English and become a translator. But the Universe got in the way...I got married and gave birth to two beautiful daughters and my dream was put away. One day I'll make it come true.

I am currently working as a waitress and you can't guess the money that I get from tips, just to talk to foreign customers in English. People often ask: "Where did you learn your English?" and I always smile and say: "I had a great teacher that inspired me a lot!"

Thank you dear teacher, your classes really changed my life!!"
“There are people who change us, people that innovate and make the difference. People who believe that we can do anything.”

During six years I counted with the constant presence in my student life of one of the teachers who most impressed me: Fátima Gonçalves. A woman that opened the door to an almost unknown language: English.

The first memories I have of her lessons are that we learned effectively and were not bored with what we were taught. A different class in a familiar and catchy atmosphere. We were a group of 25 students who were discovering a language which for us, at the time, was of little use but it was in that class I had access to a mini fantasy world. A traveled woman who brought us her experiences. A class where she made us think, where we all had the opportunity to learn and grow together.

Truth be told that years have passed and admiration grew hand in hand with friendship. If there is a woman who changed me for the better it was this one. I found myself in front of a friend / teacher who laughed a lot about life, about everything. We were happy. I was also reprimanded, of course, and was not one of the best students in the room, but I now see it is not necessary to be the best at everything to be happy.

She never doubted my abilities as a human being, and gave me the strength to go through the not so good periods of my life and made me feel I was not alone.

I am who I am and what I am due, largely, to the teachings and the dreams that I was transmitted in those 90 minutes of class, those conversations at the classroom door. This teacher has taught me that there is a world out there waiting to be conquered. I will gradually conquer it.

Today, whenever I see her, I remember our history of learning, character shaping, patience and also love. Obrigado!”
Daniel Rodrigues, 28, Photojournalist and World Press Photo award recipient

“I was born in France and came to Portugal when I was 10. Languages were always difficult for me and I didn’t want to learn another language. But I actually enjoyed English and studying it after I started classes with my teacher Fátima Gonçalves! She knew how to captivate me and made me see how important English was for my life. And that is so true! Nowadays in my profession it is very important for me to communicate in English. She helped me learn a new language in an easy and captivating way. Thanks to her my world travels are so much easier. So, yes! Teaching does change lives!”
“How can I describe Fátima as a teacher? I guess I have to start by saying I wasn't an easy student, easily bored and hardly paying any attention, but enough about me. Fátima was a magician in the classroom, always using music, movies and books to help us create bridges between subjects and it was on one of those moments she caught my eye...t-shirts made by a common friend and that was it, I knew she was different. Some might say she was a bit exotic but for me she was interesting and that's all I can ask from a teacher.

Fátima has a big passion for what she does and she tries her best to share that passion with her students. I don't really like teachers, I like Fátima. Above any other lesson, any other subject, I consider her my friend and that is more valuable than any other thing!”

João Nuno Cardoso, 32, living and working in Manchester