TOWARDS TEACHER AND LEARNER AUTONOMY: EXPLORING A PEDAGOGY OF EXPERIENCE IN TEACHER EDUCATION*

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ABSTRACT

The same as teachers, teacher educators must go beyond the technician role and become the authors of their own thoughts and actions through developing a scholarship of teacher education: inquiring into, narrating and disseminating their own practice. This paper results from this kind of scholarship. It presents and illustrates an approach to in-service teacher development that takes professional experience as the basis for promoting teacher and learner autonomy, with a focus on how it enhances a critical view of (language) education and the ability to centre teaching on learning.

KEY WORDS: Teacher education, pedagogy of experience, teacher and learner autonomy.

RESUMEN

Al igual que los profesores, los formadores deben ir más allá de un rol técnico y convertirse en autores de sus propias ideas e iniciativas profundizando en la pedagogía de la formación: investigando, escribiendo y divulgando su propia práctica. Este artículo es consecuencia de ese tipo de indagación. Presenta e ilustra un enfoque sobre la formación continua de profesores basándose en la experiencia profesional con el fin impulsar la autonomía de profesor y alumno. También se centra en cómo dicho enfoque desarrolla una visión crítica de la educación (dentro del campo de las lenguas) y la aptitud de concentrar la enseñanza en el aprendizaje.

PALABRAS CLAVE: formación de profesores, pedagogía de la experiencia, autonomía de profesor y alumno.

1. DEVELOPING A PEDAGOGY OF EXPERIENCE: WHY AND HOW

> I strongly believe that teacher education programs —both pre-service and in-service— can have a positive influence on (re)constructing teachers' pedagogy, in so much as those programs aim at *developing teachers who can and are willing to go beyond the technician role and become the authors of their own thought and action, within an interpretative view of education*. (Vieira, "Pedagogy and" 27)

This is the last paragraph of the article I wrote back in 1999 for the *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* —"Pedagogy and Autonomy: Can They Meet?"— where I presented a framework for the promotion of language learner autonomy in the school context. As I reread the article I found myself wondering about how my ideas have translated into my practice as a teacher educator since then. I believe they have, in many different ways, and the purpose of this paper is to build on the above quotation by focussing on a particular approach I have developed with in-service FL teachers since 2002, in a post-graduate course on pedagogical supervision and language education at the Universidade do Minho.[1]

I call the approach "pedagogy of experience" (Vieira, "Para"; "Reconfigurar") since it assumes a strong connection between education and experience (Dewey), building upon the idea that professional experience plays a pivotal role in the reconstruction of professional knowledge and action. This idea is commonsensical among teacher educators, especially within a reflective paradigm. However, it is not easy to put to practice in university settings where curricula are dictated by academic disciplines, pedagogies are often distanced from professional contexts, and research regimes undervalue teachers' knowledge. In this scenario, a lot needs to be changed before teacher experience becomes the nucleus of teacher education programmes. Fundamentally, we need to acknowledge the ideological nature of schooling, the complexity and uniqueness of educational settings, and the role of teachers as intellectual agents of change. Teacher educators need to focus on teachers' agendas and support their efforts to challenge and transform educational practices through pedagogical inquiry.

Why should we challenge and transform current educational practices? Many reasons might be presented, but let me just say that "lack of democracy" is the best reason:

> [...] millions of children leave school all over the world each day no better able to engage in democratic action and make changes in their communities to meet their needs than when they entered. Rather than a curriculum that constructs subjectivities around failure, around 'knowing one's place', around complacent disregard of the misfortunes and experiences of others, around an apathetic acceptance that 'things can't change', around a meritocracy that disowns its underclass, the chance always exists for education to construct curricula for challenge, for

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* This paper integrates a line of research on pedagogy at university financed by the Centre for Research in Education, Universidade do Minho, Institute of Education.

[1] The course is part of a Master Degree on Pedagogical Supervision in Language Education offered by the Universidade do Minho to in-service teachers of foreign languages (English, French, German, and Spanish). It is taught in the first semester of the programme (37.5 hours during 15 weeks/sessions). Within this course, the term "supervision" refers to the critical regulation (planning, monitoring, and evaluation) of teaching and learning processes and its scope is broad: it includes the supervision of pre-service teachers' practicum, self-supervision conducted by any teacher, collegial supervision conducted by two or more colleagues, etc.

> change, for the development of people and not the engineering of employees. (Schostak 50)

A commitment to a democratic view of society and education implies that only a pedagogy for teacher and learner autonomy is acceptable. Autonomy is here understood as a collective interest and defined as "the competence to develop as a self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in (and beyond) educational environments, within a vision of education as (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation" (Jiménez Raya, Lamb, and Vieira 1). Pedagogy for autonomy relies on the following principles (Jiménez Raya, Lamb, and Vieira 57-68):

– Encouraging responsibility, choice and flexible control
– Providing opportunities for learning to learn and self-regulation
– Creating opportunities for cognitive autonomy support
– Creating opportunities for integration of competences and explicitness of learning
– Developing intrinsic motivation
– Accepting and providing for learner differentiation
– Encouraging action-orientedness
– Fostering conversational interaction
– Promoting (teacher and learner) reflective inquiry

In the course I teach, pedagogy of experience is developed to encourage teachers to inquire into and explore teacher and learner autonomy. This has been done through "a case-based approach to pedagogical inquiry."

Like Shulman ("Theory" 543-544), I believe that cases can become the *lingua franca* of teacher learning communities:

> Cases are ways of parsing experience so practictioners can examine and learn from it. Case methods thus become strategies for helping professionals "chunk" their experience into units that can become the focus for reflective pratice. Cases therefore can become the basis for individual professional learning as well as a forum within which communities of professionals [...] can store, exchange and organize their experiences. They may well become, for teacher education, the lingua franca of teacher learning communities.

In our course, teachers analyse and produce narratives of experience, trying to answer the question "what is it a case of?" As Shulman suggests "to assert that a narrative is a *case* is to engage in an act of theory": it requires teachers to connect the narrative to personal/ other experiences, that is, to other cases, and also to "categories of experience, to theoretical classifications through which they organise and make sense of their world" ("Just" 474)). Theoretical input (on visions of education and professional development, pedagogy for autonomy, and classroom-based inquiry) is used to interpret professional narratives and to design and interpret a small-scale, autonomy-oriented classroom experiment that teachers carry out in small groups. They narrate and document it in a group portfolio, reflecting about

its value and shortcomings. In this process, they come to realise that pedagogy for autonomy is a re(ide)alistic practice situated between what *is* and what "should be." In other words, it is a pedagogy of "possibility" (Jiménez Raya, Lamb, and Vieira; Vieira, "Formaçao"; "Pedagogy for").

Pedagogical inquiry starts with the identification of problems or dilemmas, which are transformed into plans for action that incorporate the promotion of teacher and learner autonomy. My role is to support and guide the groups by providing input when needed. Classroom interventions are carried out by one teacher in each group, in one of his/ her classes. Data is collected and analysed, and a descriptive-interpretative narrative of 15-20 pages is produced. This narrative is the main element in the group portfolio, which also includes records of planning, data collection, out-of-class group meetings, course and self-evaluation. Each portfolio is assessed by the group and then by me, according to criteria related to the quality of the pedagogical experiment and the narrative. On the basis of my feedback, groups can revise their narratives as an optional task. Revised narratives have been used in subsequent years for case analysis. Sometimes, teachers present their cases in professional meetings and publish their narratives or short versions of them.[2] Whenever I write about the approach, I draw on their experience to illustrate teacher development processes. I will do so in the next section.

The approach I suggest requires that teachers participate in curricular decisions and play a decisive role in defining what and how they want to learn, that is, pedagogy becomes curriculum-in-action (Barnett and Coate). It also involves their active participation in self-questioning and self-evaluation as empowering processes whereby they take control over what counts as valid professional knowledge. It further requires a high level of commitment to educational change, which usually entails reframing beliefs and practices, exposing fears and dilemmas, taking risks in action, identifying and facing constraints, and dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity. Overall, teachers undergo a process of reshaping their professional identities.

The following section illustrates the approach by drawing on an experiment focussed on oral reading in the EFL classroom, conducted by a group of four teachers in 2009/10. An analysis of their portfolio (Teixeira et al.) shows how a pedagogy of experience can empower teachers to pursue autonomy in language education.[3]

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[2] The GT-PA —*Grupo de Trabalho-Pedagogia para a Autonomia* (Working Group-Pedagogy for Autonomy)— a group of teachers and academic researchers/ teacher educators that I have coordinated since 1997, has been an important forum for the dissemination of teachers' pedagogical experiments. For a detailed account of the GT-PA, see Vieira, "Enhancing."

[3] Permission was given by the teachers to use excerpts of their narrative and other elements in their portfolio. All excerpts presented are translated from Portuguese.

2. RECONSTRUCTING EXPERIENCE TOWARDS TEACHER AND LEARNER AUTONOMY

Inquiry and experiential writing play a crucial role in teachers' professional development:

> Through inquiry, teachers frame and reframe the issues and problems they face in their professional worlds. As teachers engage in narrative inquiry, they become theorizers in their own right, and as theorizers, they look less for certain answers and more to rethink what they thought they already knew. Thus, we believe that teachers' stories of inquiry are not only *about* professional development; they *are* professional development. Narrative inquiry becomes a means through which teachers actualize their ways of knowing and growing that nourish and sustain their professional development throughout their careers. (Johnson and Golombek 6)

I hope to illustrate these ideas in the remainder of this paper, with a focus on how a pedagogy of experience can enhance two interrelated dimensions of professional competence towards teacher and learner autonomy: "a critical view of (language) education and centring teaching on learning."

2.1. Getting Off the Rails

> The key educational issue is how to get people off the rails. If a formal curriculum is imagined as being like a chariot race where competitors go round and round in circles until some arbitrary finishing point is reached, then deliberate crashes, derailings or simply stopping and not playing the game become the only real challenges to the system. (Schostak 37).

Pedagogy for autonomy entails a deep commitment to an emancipatory view of education and a critical stance towards established regimes. It requires teachers to reject the role of technicians and assume the role of critical inquirers and constructors of change. This is exactly the view expressed by this group of teachers:

> We all feel that our students represent a continuous challenge and increasingly demand that we take an inquiry, reflective and pro-active stance towards the process of teaching and learning. By rejecting conformity and facing uncertainty, dilemmas and tensions, with a lot of persistence and effort, we chose to break with the limits of our everyday life and let subversion cross our sinuous way. (Portfolio: Introduction)

This view of what being a teacher means is in tune with a constructivist paradigm of education, in which teachers are seen as critical intellectuals who struggle for their own and their students' empowerment by rejecting a position of subjugation to authority and reclaiming the right to direct their own action in accordance with "an exciting vision of schooling," a vision that stresses "the role that education

can play in producing a just, inclusive, democratic, and imaginative future" (Kincheloe, *Teachers* 111).

These teachers, like other colleagues, admit that at the beginning of our course they were not prepared to assume an inquiry stance, although they were concerned about the extent to which their teaching was learner-centred:

> Even though it was difficult to plan and develop our case study, due to our inexperience in looking at teaching as an act of inquiry, we believe that, in a latent form, common concerns and worries were simmering, which converged towards a democratic vision of education focussed on the learner. (Portfolio: Narrative)

This latent orientation towards a democratic vision of education is something that I have recurrently observed in teachers as they start the course and we begin discussing what education is about. They are usually unsatisfied with their teaching and eager to learn about alternative practices that can make it more learner-centred, but they also feel unprepared to do it and disempowered by a school culture that stifles autonomy. Along with Kincheloe (*Teachers* 2), I can say that "Teachers understand that something is not right. My conversations with them often touch raw nerves, an anger just below the surface. Such alienation finds its origin in their perception that few in the organization respect them, few value their voices, their knowledge of the educational process." As our conversations unfold, they begin to disclose silenced beliefs and desires, but also criticisms, fears and anxieties, and they become painfully aware of the gap between their "espoused theories" and their "theories-in-action" (Argyris and Schön), which often generates uneasiness and loss of self-confidence. This process paves the way to transformation, to "getting off the rails," but real derailings can only be triggered by pedagogical inquiry and experiential learning:

> Because we are teachers, we know that applying theory to practice is not always feasible and sometimes our intentions are just on paper [...] Throughout the weeks we began to realise that our intentions were starting to materialize: at first with a lot of worries and uncertainties, not being able to delimit an area for action and find a thread of action, but then visualising a relevant, coherent path that presupposed the integration of theory and practice, based on growing processes of negotiation, in which the teacher educator's role began to fade away as our transformation as student teachers became visible. (Portfolio: Course Evaluation)

The process of transformation is not dissociated from the "nature" of the interventions teachers design and carry out in the classroom. By trying to centre teaching on learning, they question ingrained routines and imagine alternative strategies that better respond to their aspirations as professionals and to the needs of their students. As they do it, their theories and practices evolve. The following sections seek to illustrate how all this happens.

2.2. Framing a Problem

As Shulman puts it, pedagogy starts with frustration, that is, awareness that something is wrong and needs to be changed ("Toward"). This group of teachers developed an experiment on oral reading in the EFL classroom because they realised that their former practice —asking students, one by one, to read a text (any kind of text) by chunks as the initial step of reading comprehension tasks— was inadequate and needed to be reconsidered. The educational value of this traditional routine is very low, as became clear in our discussions: it does not support reading comprehension or promote reading fluency and expressiveness; it does not help the students understand how reading relates to the content and nature of the text; it does not help them realise what reading aloud entails and what can make it difficult; and it does not foster self-confidence in poor readers, those who most need help. Why, then, do teachers use this meaningless routine? I find it hard to explain. The fact is that they do, and so did these teachers before their experiment:

> Throughout our teaching practice we have realised that our students reject oral reading in a foreign language and see it as a moment of constraint and anxiety [...]. Our own attitude in class does not always promote student reflection and involvement in ways that lead them to understand, accept and adjust their reading experiences as readers. On the contrary, it leads them to inhibition or withdrawal —"teacher, I don't like reading," "teacher, I cannot read."
> Confronted with this reality we were struck by several doubts: (1) How can students be motivated to read aloud? (2) Are conditions created for expressive reading to take place?; (3) How can problem solving by the students be promoted?; (4) How can self-correction in expressive reading be promoted? (Portfolio: Narrative)

Questioning one's practice and finding an area for improvement is not as easy as the above quote may suggest. In fact, these teachers' starting point was quite different. They brainstormed several possibilities and decided to experiment with new technologies in class (podcasting). One of the teachers was very enthusiastic about technology and they all realised that students enjoy it and need to learn how to use it. However, they also agreed that technology "would only be pedagogically useful in the service of the development of other competences" (Portfolio: Introduction). After consideration, they decided that the development of oral reading competences might be an appropriate choice. Technology would be a useful resource for students to record and listen to their readings, but not the focus of their work. Later on, as they started to design learning tasks to implement in class, their attention began to focus on how to enhance the students' abilities to learn how to learn, especially by raising their awareness of oral reading difficulties and competences, and by involving them in self-correction, self-evaluation, and reflection about the approach to be implemented. In the end, they theorise their experience as a case of promoting learner transformation and autonomy:

> [...] our study focusses particularly on the students' "ability to manage learning," which is, according to Holec, the definition of autonomy, and on reflection upon

> learning, which is central for their language and learning awareness. In fact, what interested us was the process of each student's transformation. More important than the product (improving students' performance in expressive oral reading) was the process of developing metacognitive strategies [...]. (Portfolio: Narrative)

They also see their experience as a case of professional collaborative inquiry that enhanced a reflective, (self-) regulatory stance towards teaching. In sum, the problem of inadequate oral reading practices was reframed within an emancipatory view of education.

2.3. Moving from School Knowledge to Action Knowledge

In designing a plan for action, difficulties arise at various levels, from major issues (e.g. does this task promote learner autonomy?) to minor details (e.g. what title is more suitable for this task?). For these teachers, a crucial problem was the choice of the text to use for oral reading in class. Their first choices relied on the notion of "school knowledge" rather than "action knowledge" (Barnes), that is, knowledge that relates to life experience:

> After choosing our topic, the appropriateness of the text was another challenge. As we were not aware of what oral reading entails in scientific terms, our choices focussed on dialogues in which oral reading was just about using speech acts: At the Restaurant; Job Interview. In revising our plan, the teacher alerted us about the need to reconsider our choice:
> "Well, you have to think this further, because an interview is NOT a type of text to be read aloud. What types of texts are liable to be read aloud? If you want to use an interactive text, it seems to me that it will have to be, for example, a theatre play... When actors perform the play they do not read because they already learnt the text by heart, but the process to get there is an oral reading process. It might also be a dialogue in a piece of literature, since reading literature aloud is also an authentic task." (Vieira, feedback on plan, 13/12/2009). This stage was a turning point in our own learning process. (Portfolio: Introduction)

After some didactic readings, the group decided to use a simplified version of part of a play —*Cinderella*[4]— justifying their choice on the basis of task authenticity, relation to student experience (fairy tales), and linguistic appropriateness to the students' level. They were now aware of issues involved in text choice. They had somehow "de-schooled" their reasoning to make a choice that was more action-oriented and educational.

Promoting action knowledge is particularly relevant for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have learning difficulties. This was the case of the class where the teachers chose to implement their plan:

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[4] *Cinderella* from Charles Perrault, retold by Dooley and Loyd, Berkshire: Express, 2004.

> Most students come from disadvantaged family backgrounds. Parents have low educational training and their relationship with their children oscillates between permissiveness and repression. All the students are marked by an experience of school failure. Overall, they have learning difficulties in oral comprehension and oral and written production as well as a low self-esteem that is evident in their fear of making mistakes and of public exposure. As regards oral reading, most students show an attitude of resistance [...]. (Portfolio: Narrative)

This was a class of 11 students who were attending a vocational programme that is equivalent to the 9th grade. Students in these programmes usually have a history of school failure and low expectations regarding academic achievement. Enhancing motivation through investment in meaningful learning is thus crucial in this context.

2.4. Subverting Routines

Along with theoretical knowledge, various forms of what Claxton calls "intuition" are needed for transformative decision-making: expertise, judgement, sensitivity, creativity, and rumination. All of these are present when teachers design and carry out their plans for action. Until a final plan is reached, several possibilities are discussed: "The imperative of an extensive working agenda was... TRANSFORMATION. Like Penelope, we wove and undid our "shawl": the plan, the objectives, the activities, the materials... were successively reformulated" (Portfolio: Introduction).

The teachers' intervention was radically different from their usual oral reading practices, although at first it seemed to be similar:

> The students organize themselves into groups and the teacher asks them to read the texts aloud. The incredulous actors begin and moments of "robot reading" follow, full of hesitations, "it's you... no, it's you," in a slow, syncopated rhythm, with strange pronunciation... They do not question the strategy, but an effort to please is noticeable. Finally, when asked about what they did, they answer "a dialogue among characters," "a theatre play," "reading" [...]
> "What type of reading?," one insists... They get to the idea of expressive reading. "Expressive Oral Reading" is written on the blackboard.
> When questioned about the easiness of the first task, the actors intervene with divergent comments: "simple text, not very long" or "because we did not know the text, it was difficult." Difficulties pour in through "brainstorming" and they seem to begin to understand that the stage director did not freak out, all this is a new performance technique that she wants to test. When confronted with the question "What is good reading?" they are still staggering and uncertainty seems to hang over their minds again: Is she thinking that we have to invert roles?/Are we supposed to be the teacher/stage director? Then the explanation comes —"You were not well instructed." "Ah!" The mystery starts to be disclosed, but the strategy of this play is not yet revealed: "It was done on purpose, later you will understand why." (Portfolio: Narrative)

The plan was developed in two sequential lessons of 90 minutes each. The teachers describe their action as "scenes," in the style of a script as above. Those scenes are summarised below based on their portfolio. Although they do not label them, they correspond to three important elements of centring teaching on learning: "awareness-raising," "self-directed practice," and "self-evaluation."

Scene 1: Awareness-raising

Sitting in groups, students are asked to read aloud a scene from the script of the play *Cinderella*; each group is asked to manage the task without any previous preparation. After a while, the teacher conducts a brainstorming activity about oral reading, in the students' mother tongue. She writes "Leitura Oral Expressiva" (expressive oral reading) on the blackboard and asks them to tell her about their difficulties in the previous task, so that awareness is raised about what good oral reading entails (pronunciation, fluency, etc.); she registers the students' problems and then asks the students to associate them with reading competences (intonation, expressiveness, rhythm, punctuation, pronunciation, fluency, understanding); finally, she asks them to fill in a text about conditions needed to develop oral reading abilities:

In order to read expressively, I need to:

1. Read the text in _____ before reading it aloud.
   a. Use support techniques as I read it: signal what I don't understand, consult the _____ and write the meaning of new words, take note of unfamiliar pronunciation, etc.
2. _____ the global meaning of the text.
3. _____ to the oral text, more than once, before reading it aloud.
4. Read it _____ several times to practice expressiveness.
5. Practise oral reading in _____ (dramatic text)
6. Train the _____ and the _____ through access to reading models.
7. Ask for the help of others (more fluent students/ teacher) to overcome my _____.

*understand *dictionary *pronunciation *listen *aloud *dialogue *silence *difficulties *intonation

Scene 2: Self-directed Practice

The students perform the tasks referred in the above text: they read the texts in silence, solve any comprehension difficulties and then rehearse oral reading; dictionaries and a CD with a model reading are provided for each group; students record their reading attempts and listen to them in their group (podcast); then each group presents their recordings to the class.

Scene 3: Self-evaluation

The teacher asks the students to fill in a questionnaire where they self-evaluate their reading performance before and after the preparation strategies implemented. This questionnaire integrates the problems pointed out by the students after the first reading (brainstorming), grouped under the reading competences analysed. Finally, students and teacher have a conversation about the whole experience.

The teachers' evaluation of their experience was very optimistic. The students' self-evaluations confirmed that when students are properly prepared, oral reading competences are developed (see results below).

	Initial reading			Final reading		
Problems[5]	√	?	x	√	?	x
Intonation and expressiveness						
I was not expressive	3	8	0	0	1	10
I read in a low voice	2	7	2	1	0	10
Rhythm and punctuation						
I did not respect the punctuation	4	3	4	0	3	8
Pronunciation						
I did not say the words well	5	6	0	1	2	8
I had difficulties pronouncing the words	5	6	0	0	5	6
Fluency						
I did not read the text throughout	3	4	4	0	4	7
I hesitated in some words	5	4	2	0	8	3
Understanding						
I didn't understand the meaning of words	4	7	0	0	1	10
I had no instructions to follow	7	3	1	0	1	10

√ - I felt the problem a lot / ? - I felt the problem a little / x - I didn't feel the problem
(Portfolio: Narrative—final questionnaire results)

The students enjoyed the lessons a lot and showed interest in repeating this type of oral reading practice. A student who had always failed English in previous years suggested: "teacher, we could stage a play." They also showed metacognitive awareness about what had been different this time. For example:

– "we were not prepared to read," "we didn't quite know what was intended" (inappropriate practices and lack of transparency can be used intentionally to provoke process reflection and greater awareness of teaching and learning)
– "our difficulties were valued" (difficulties can become positive elements in learning, provided that students are aware of them and how to surpass them)
– "with a lot of training even I can read more or less well" (sense of accomplishment and self-confidence can be raised through student preparation for tasks)

[5] The problems listed were referred by the students in the brainstorming activity after the first reading. By respecting the students' views and wording, the teachers intended to make them co-producers of knowledge and partners of pedagogical inquiry. However, we may question the reduced notion of "expressiveness" here, as it relates to the other competences mentioned separately.

– "I liked the link [podcast] as I now can practise any sentence, and that's cool!" (useful resources can enhance transference of learning)

The teachers observed that the students' strategic abilities for oral reading were differentiated, and that reflection on learning expanded their learning awareness and promoted self-direction in learning how to read aloud. The quote that follows highlights what they perceived to be the major educational purposes and gains of their experience:

> The initial moments of reflection between the teacher and the class aimed at making the students aware of difficulties, quality criteria, conditions and strategies that good oral expressive reading entails. Later on, students had the opportunity to develop self-directed learning activities. Gradually, they liberated themselves and started to look for strategies to solve their difficulties, gaining self-confidence and autonomy in accomplishing, monitoring and evaluating their performance and progress. This interactive strategic learning, as opposed to individualistic and competitive learning, is essential for students to develop cooperation, co-responsibility, self-direction, sharing and negotiation competences, allowing a higher level of commitment to the proposed tasks, making students constructors of knowledge, and respecting their interests and learning pace. This type of lessons needs to be more frequent in order to support our students, believing in their ability to create conditions for solving their problems and to assume an active role in meaning construction. This perspective is close to that of critical constructivists who "support the notion that one of the central roles of teaching entails student commitment to the process of knowledge construction" (Kincheloe, *Construtivismo* 11). For this reason, we believe that this kind of practice dilutes inequalities and injustices in the classroom, paving the way for a democratic and emancipatory school (Zeichner 26). (Portfolio: Narrative)

As a comment to the teachers' final statement—"we believe that this kind of practice dilutes inequalities and injustices in the classroom, paving the way for a democratic and emancipatory school"—I wrote: "I agree!" In fact, even though schooling socialises teachers and students into established regimes and fosters obedience to various forms of authority, it is still possible to subvert its routines and counteract its domesticating force by "travelling through the space of possibility," a provisional space that stands between what (language) education is and what it should be. As Schostak puts it, "the chance always exists for education to construct curricula for challenge, for change, for the development of people and not the engineering of employees" (50).

Surely, these teachers' experience is only a very modest contribution to subvert the *status quo*, but it is also a case of how small-scale, teacher-led inquiry *can* promote teacher and learner autonomy *to some extent*. We must not forget that these four teachers will go on teaching for many years, influencing the lives of thousands of students. If this experiment has enhanced a critical vision of (language) education as well as their ability to centre teaching on learning, then it is reasonable to expect that it will have some impact on the quality of their future teaching, and on the quality of their future students' learning.

2.5. Relearning Writing

Using writing as a tool for inquiry and professional development often requires us to unlearn what school has taught us about what counts as legitimate writing: "The discursive practices of school are always with us when we write: we do not want to be excluded, we do not wish to produce texts that are not considered worthy by our perceived readers, especially by readers who so often count as the significant others in our educational histories, such as teachers" (Karlsson 46). Paradoxically, fear of exclusion can perpetuate modes of knowing that are both domesticated and domesticating, contrary to self-discovery and the problematization of reality, as if reality were out there to be described as an objective entity separated from our selves.

I strongly encourage the creative use of language in narrative inquiry in order to counteract the disempowering effect of neutral academic discourses that say nothing about the uniqueness of pedagogical experience or its actors. Pedagogical writing demands an intimate relationship between experience, writer and text: "Writing teaches us what we know, and in what way we know what we know. As we commit ourselves to paper we see ourselves mirrored in this text. Now the text confronts us. We try to read it as someone else might, but that is actually quite impossible, since we cannot help but load the words with the intentions of our project" (Van Manen 127).

An example of creative writing is the way these teachers narrate their intervention and structure their narrative metaphorically into acts in a play:

Act I –Conspiracy on backstage...
[presentation of theme with a focus on breaking routines and promoting teacher and learner autonomy]

Act II –Preparing the stage set...
[explanation and justification of pedagogical choices]

Act III –...and assigning roles
[context and why choices are appropriate to the students]

Act IV –The stage director defines a strategy...
[conceptualisation of the case study as a teaching-research intervention]

Act V –Raising the curtain...
[descriptive-analytical account of pedagogical action, based on observation and data collection]

Act VI –Dropping the curtain...
[Final reflection on the experiment: purpose, outcomes, and implications]
(Portfolio: Table of Contents, with my explanation of content in brackets)

The staging metaphor gives prominence to the role of the students as actors and the teacher as stage director. In this case, however, the actors were not just performing a script: they participated in its writing, a subversive strategy "conspired on backstage" and later revealed to them. The metaphor also highlights the

uniqueness and complexity of pedagogical inquiry, as well as the wholeness of professional stories.

The title of the narrative —*Leitura oral... Qual é o drama afinal?* (translating literally as *Oral Reading... What's the Drama after All?*)— draws on two of the meanings of "drama" in Portuguese: a theatre play (the case story) and a tragic event (the problems associated with traditional oral reading). The question "Qual é o drama afinal?" is also used in colloquial speech to mean "What's the big deal?," inducing the idea that oral reading need not be a "tragic event" after all, provided that it is "performed" meaningfully. As I see it, this idea points out the main outcome of pedagogy for autonomy as pedagogy of possibility—what seemed "impossible" becomes "possible."

3. ALL THIS SEEMS FINE, BUT...

No "buts." Not this time. I will not refer to shortcomings of a pedagogy of experience in teacher education. I have done so in other writings (Vieira, "Para"; "Reconfigurar"), but here I decided not to do it. There is a reason.

Unlike Shulman, I think that innovation also comes from joy and satisfaction, not just frustration. Actually, positive feelings are probably the most important outcome and driving force of our struggles for autonomy in education. They motivate us to resist, persist, and move on. They invade us whenever we ask ourselves, as educators, if our action is truly "pedagogical" and, for a moment, our answer is "maybe," or even "yes." Although we know this "yes" to be provisional, even illusive, it fuels our hope for the future and other "yesses" to come. And it helps us inspire our students to experience the same as they join us in the sinuous, passionate journey of pedagogy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the four teachers who kindly accepted that I draw on their case in this text and quote from their course portfolio. My text is dedicated to all the teachers who have accompanied me in the exploration of pedagogy of experience for promoting teacher and learner autonomy in language education.

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