

Pedagogy for autonomy is a continuous struggle for transformative and empowering education. It has struggle embedded in its very nature of hinder teacher and learner development, acting towards challenging and reshaping oppressive forces and circumstances, and being willing to deal with complexity, uncertainty, and risk-taking, without losing one's hopes and ideals. Our main purpose is to present and discuss ways in which (critical) reflecting, acting, and being emerge in contexts of teaching and/or teacher education, not as realisations of a grand theory of pedagogy for autonomy, but rather as local, idiosyncratic struggles to grasp and enhance the challenge that autonomy may (not) take in diverse educational settings. Although from different angles, the chapters highlight the central role of teacher and learner development as inter-related aspects of pedagogy for autonomy in language education.

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Flávia Vieira (ed.)

Struggling for Autonomy in Language Education

Reflecting, Acting, and Being



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Appendix
Categories for portfolio content analysis

REFLECTIVE PORTFOLIOS STUDENT TEACHERS		RESEARCH PORTFOLIO SUPERVISOR-RESEARCHER
REFLECTION ON PEDAGOGICAL ACTION ¹¹	COLLECTING, SELECTING AND ORGANISING EVIDENCE	REFLECTION ON SUPERVISING ACTION
Expression of feelings and emotions	<i>Reflection for action</i> Problem identification	Introduction of portfolio strategy
Description/Narration of action	Setting the plan of action	Narration of supervising action
Reflection on pedagogical options ¹²	<i>Reflection on action</i>	Reflection on pedagogical actions
Inquiry into pedagogical action ¹³	Implementation	Inquiry into pedagogical action
Problem identification	Evaluation	Self-reflection
Self-assessment	Reflection	Setting the plan of action
Self-reflection ¹⁴	Self-assessment	Difficulties/ Doubts/Constraints
Setting the plan of action	Difficulties/Doubts/Constraints	Potentialities
Self-direction ¹⁵	Potentialities	
Commitment with the training programme ¹⁶	Suggestions/ Recommendations	
Research attitudes ¹⁷		
Vertical feedback ¹⁸		
Horizontal feedback ¹⁹		

11 Looking back on the action; Awareness of essential aspects; Creating alternative methods (Korthagen, 1982)

12 When the student teacher analyses and evaluates strategies or when she justifies their use.

13 When the student teacher questions strategies; rationalises the justifications she gives and the effects and implications of her options.

14 When the student teacher becomes aware of the way she acts; rationalises roles (hers and her students'); identifies strong aspects of her teaching and/or areas for improvement.

15 When the student teacher sets her own learning aims/self-development priorities; shows responsibility and ethical commitment towards her actions and autonomy in decision-making; shows interest in experimenting and enthusiasm for continuous learning (about her and about teaching/learning).

16 When the student teacher understands and gives importance to the training strategies.

17 When the student teacher shows interest in researching about teaching methods; describes and explains the researched theories; establishes connections between theory and her practice.

18 Feedback provided by the supervisor.

19 Feedback provided by peers.

Then the I becomes Us... on collaborative supervision journals and
the development of professional autonomy

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Introduction

Based on our experience as teacher educators and supervisors of professional practice, we will present an approach to the development of professional autonomy through the use of collaborative supervision journals in two different contexts: pre-service education of kindergarten teachers and post-graduate education of foreign language teachers. The use of journals as reflective narratives of experience aims at amplifying educational knowledge. The collaborative inquiry dimension aims at fostering social and professional critical awareness, thus increasing the possibilities of participated and co-constructed teacher development processes to occur.

The journals, written between two or more people involved in the professional development process, favour a reflective and indagatory approach to professional action that is emancipatory to the people involved. Furthermore, because it is a dialogic process, writing a collaborative journal allows the participants to deepen their understanding of vicarious experience and of the process of knowledge production in professional contexts, for it involves writing about feelings and emotions, as well as about thoughts and actions. It allows teachers to dive into the complexities of practice, describe it, confront their perceptions with others' and reconstruct their theories of practice.

Using collaborative journals presupposes systematic regulation of the teaching and learning process, so that problems and solutions, potentialities and constraints may be identified. Only then are we in a position to validate their benefits as a teacher development strategy on the road to professional autonomy. Understanding assessment as regulation of the learning processes also includes the self-assessment of attitudes, representations, knowledge and beliefs (Moreira, 2005). When self-assessment is undertaken in a context where everybody contributes to the intentional transformation of educational experiences by co-constructing knowledge, the possibilities of success in the development of professional autonomy will most likely be enhanced.

We will describe two case studies: one in initial kindergarten teacher education and another in foreign language teaching in a Master's programme¹.

1 The authors will present each case separately. As the institutional supervisor in case one, Deolinda is responsible for its writing; as the teacher in the Masters' programme, Maria Alfredo writes about case two.

In order to illustrate the developmental value of these journals towards both teacher (but also learner) autonomy we will characterise two different dimensions of the construction of educational knowledge that emerges from the writings: in the first case study, student teachers' knowing-in-action is built on the basis of the confrontation of different perspectives on the educational process, involving kindergarten teachers and small children; in the second case study, an experienced teacher deepens her professional knowledge and enlarges the arena of the problematic (cf. Tom, 1985), by progressively reflecting on critical perspectives on the teaching/ learning process that involves her, other teachers and youngsters.

Our main motivation for these studies comes from our need to improve teacher education practices in different contexts of professional development, along with a growing awareness of the need to foster teacher development strategies that have the potential of transforming pedagogical practice through critical and dialogic reflection. This way, we believe both professional autonomy and a learner-centred pedagogy will be enhanced. Our aim is to articulate reflective teacher development strategies with the development of learner autonomy, seeking to study the role of teachers, supervisors and student teachers in the co-construction of pedagogical knowledge, through reflective dialogue on the participants' personal theories on educational situations. This orientation is associated with the intention of creating teacher and supervisor development situations that will allow (prospective and experienced) teachers to co-construct their professional knowledge in cooperation with significant others. Therefore the road to professional autonomy and emancipation becomes a collective endeavour, instead of an individual one.

1. Case Study One: building professional practical knowledge (Deolinda)

Case study one was developed within pre-service teacher education. It took place in the teaching practice year of two female student teachers in the Polytechnic School of Oporto, in the school year of 2006/2007. The teaching practice year takes place during the fourth year of an undergraduate degree on Kindergarten Teaching, in one kindergarten school. Student teachers are grouped in pairs and are supervised by one experienced kindergarten teacher – the cooperating teacher – and by a teacher from the School of Education. The triad² composed by each student teacher, the kindergarten teacher and the higher education teacher is called *teacher development triad*. Some teaching practice schools integrate three or four triads, depending on the number of kindergarten

student teachers who are placed in the same school. As the institutional supervisor, I had been developing, for some years now, a reflective approach to initial teacher education that integrates action research, class observation, and written reflection (Ribeiro, 2005). Recently, I started using the collaborative journal as a narrative of personal reflection, built in dialogue with peers and with the cooperating teacher (Ribeiro, 2006). As a reflective dialogical narrative or dialogue journal, the entry in the student teacher's journal is divided into three parts: one for each of the student teachers and another for the cooperating teacher. Entries are recorded twice a month and are about a pedagogical activity developed by a student teacher. The writing process is as follows: the student teacher who observes the activity developed by her colleague writes an interpretive commentary on it, integrating the teacher's interaction with the children and the children's behaviour during the pedagogical game³. Afterwards the observed teacher reacts to her colleague's commentary and builds her own. Finally, the cooperating teacher registers her opinion, both on the pedagogical situation and on the student teachers' interpretations.

Within this methodology, my role as the institutional supervisor is to provide feedback and raise issues for reflection, problematising the situations under scrutiny. I register my comments in the same journal on the side. These comments are later clarified in the supervisory meetings with the whole teaching practice group. Written reflection does not substitute weekly oral reflection with the teaching practice triads, focussed on the analysis of both children's learning processes and student teachers' learning processes, as well as on planning future action. Interacting with the text produced by the triad aims at developing the student teachers' critical reflectivity and, therefore, deepening their pedagogical discourse on the practices they observe and implement.

This case study involved two student teachers, one cooperating teacher and me, as the institutional school supervisor. JS was 22 years old and had a part-time job. LC was 23 and was a full-time student. As for the cooperating teacher, she had been working as a kindergarten teacher for 15 years, 4 of these as a supervisor. She did not have specialised training as a supervisor, but had been attending the development sessions that regularly take place at our institution under my responsibility. The kindergarten school where they were placed was a private institution, partly financed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, in a semi-urban environment, near Oporto.

3 'Pedagogical Game' is the characteristic activity of kindergarten school children, who build their learning through it. Kindergarten school is the first stage of the Portuguese Educational System. Compulsory education comprises primary and lower secondary education (ages 6 to 16).

2 Triad is based on the meaning of dyad proposed by Brofenbrenner (1979, cit. in Portugal, 1992), as paying attention to one another (dyad) or to each other (triad) when involved in joint activities but assuming different roles and statuses.

In order to highlight the impact of collaborative journals on the construction of student teachers' practical knowledge, the analysis of some journal entries will now be undertaken⁴.

Student teachers start seeing reflection on practice as an inquiry-oriented task that allows for self-assessment of professional development processes, including the re-organisation of development goals and educational practice. Collaborative reflection is perceived as a strategy that facilitates knowledge construction about and with the other, by promoting openness with others, favouring interaction that is adjusted to personal needs, and facilitating the development of significant action for the actors involved. However, the results from reflection are only perceived as a benefit when they are (re)invested in practice, thus showing that reflective dialogue has to have implications in the improvement of professional action.

Commentary by the observer student teacher

As I see it, this game is an excellent strategy to increase this group's [of children] vocabulary. Upon reflection on this activity I believe that it would have been better to post the posters on the wall and then exploit them with the children. (...) the procedure used created a certain amount of confusion among the group who could not see both posters so that the children could successfully complete the activity (...).[JS, December 2006]

Commentary by the observed student teacher

Indeed, as JS suggested, I believe that the best option would be to place the posters on the wall. However, for reasons of use of space, I had to hold the posters. Notwithstanding, in the second stage of the activity, the main poster wasn't on the floor, but was held by the special education kindergarten teacher, which allowed a good visibility of both posters. Even though I think this obstacle was surpassed, I also believe that this idea resulting from this reflection should be taken into consideration in future activities (...). [LC, December 2006]

Commentary by the cooperating teacher

I agree with JS when she says that the posters should have been placed on the wall, so that children could see better and then be better able to compare them (...) LC managed to create a communication atmosphere that made it possible for children to interact and learn. She listened to all the children, gave them enough room and valued their contributions, which motivated them to participate in the activity at hand (...). [SC, December 2006]

The student teachers' perceptions give evidence to the role the collaborative journal plays in the improvement of observational skills, reflection on practice, and future action. Knowledge is shared, all participants assuming that each perspective is relevant for the reconstruction of action strategies that take the

children as the starting point and main focus for reflection. The role of the cooperating teacher is stimulating to the student teacher, as she values positive aspects of pedagogical action, thus reinforcing the student teacher's self-esteem, and views failures as opportunities for professional growth.

Commentary by the observer student teacher

Children used a paper sheet shaped as butterfly wings. With this paper shape we also intended that the group would develop the concept of space (...) children were delighted with the material (painted wood) because they had never used it. The activity went very well, the children were integrated, which pleased us, for it is a sign that the group is achieving some of the aims we had for this week (...). [JS, November 2006]

Commentary by the observed student teacher

As children were spreading glue, adults were accompanying each one, interacting, asking questions and exemplifying different ways of using the material (...) I agree with JS when she says that this group's reaction motivates us to have them experiment with new materials, as their enthusiasm and participation is complete, judging from their faces and bodies (...). Even though the entire activity was reflected upon and planned, and the materials were at the children's disposal, we did not predict (...) that they wouldn't work (...) however, I believe that it is a lesson to be taken in future situations: to know in depth the materials' properties before using them (...). [LC, November 2006]

Commentary by the cooperating teacher

Children should have had the opportunity to use and experiment with all the material before gluing it; therefore, I think the fact that the first experience failed was positive, because it allowed us the opportunity to change the situation for the second group of children (...). [SC, November 2006]

The student teachers' writing also reveals a growing acceptance of divergent thought. Their professional knowing-in-action evolves through the confrontation of different points of view on educational action that acquires different meanings as student teachers' awareness of practice emerges and is subjected to scrutiny by all participants. In this process, the student teachers' personal and professional knowledge is influenced by confrontation and dialogue among all actors involved, dissent being viewed as a benefit in one's own development.

4 All excerpts from journals have been translated from Portuguese.

**Commentary by the
observer student teacher**

The 'colour domino', as the name states, is a game that allows trying out the colours (...). When conducting the activity, I believe that JS could have associated the colours with objects in the room, or even to children's clothes (...). I believe that it would be more appropriate to children who have difficulties to propose the association to concrete things, that would allow them direct and careful observation, so that they could build their knowledge (...). At the end of the game, JS made a valuable proposal to the group in terms of their development (...). I believe that her request for help in putting the materials away was very useful, so that children may start to regard the storing of didactic resources as part of the activity itself (...) with the intent of increasing the development of their management skills and responsibility attitudes towards the room's didactic resources and games that belong to all. [LC, March 2007]

As the end of the teaching practice year was getting closer, I sought to identify the student teachers' perceptions on the role of the collaborative supervision journal in their professional development process. Therefore I asked them to write about the meaning they attributed to this strategy and to assess it. The analysis of their texts revealed that they are aware of the development of observation competences, the development of personal professional knowledge

**Commentary by the
observed student teacher**

As the children were naming the colours, I was watching some children that were having more difficulties in expressing themselves in this activity (...). The association was based on previous learning (...) therefore, one of the children made an immediate association of yellow to the sun. So, I think differently from LC (...) in spite of the sun not being a touchable thing, we can watch it, presupposing that the child has already some knowledge on the sun's characteristics, as s/he had already been involved in plastic expression where s/he had painted the sun yellow. However, I agree when she says that I could have used more concrete examples, using the colours of some objects in the room, as children interact with them and express themselves with them. My attention to each child and to what s/he already knew was something I cared about, as the kindergarten teacher is the game's mediator and seeks to be as attentive to the child's difficulties as possible. [JS, March 2007]

**Commentary by the
cooperating teacher**

In spite of the fact that the activity was performed in the large group, I believe that JS was paying attention to each child, knowing how to manage the group so that all children could give their contribution. JS listened to all children and valued their participation, thus developing their well-being and their self-esteem (...) it was important that JS asked the children for help in choosing the location for storing the game and, afterwards, help in the storage itself (...). Through cooperation, JS provided the children with the possibility to collaborate in the learning process. [SC, March 2007]

through dialogue and confrontation of perspectives, the importance of supportive help and stimulus by supervisors, the development of attitudes of inquiry and openness to the Other, and, finally, the construction of emancipatory practical knowledge through collaboration. The results of this final evaluation are illustrated below.

***Development of
observation competences***
Observation comes as a first step to reflection on practice, as they refer to it as a basis for the critical analysis and for the confrontation of opinions, without which they could not build a collaborative journal.

***Development of personal
professional knowledge
through dialogue and
confrontation of
perspectives***
Dialogue and confrontation of ideas and perceptions of practice, under the form of written narratives, appear to have been facilitated by the development of verbal and systematic reflective habits among the triad. By demonstrating knowledge (and the lack of it), student teachers find an opportunity to redefine learning strategies and to reconstruct their own professional development processes.

***Importance of supportive
help and stimulus from
supervisors***

"(...) a careful and attentive observation is the most important ingredient in the construction of a journal. Our reflection, critical analysis and confrontation of opinion are sustained by it." [LC, April 2007]

Being observed during an activity does not make me nervous because I feel at ease with the educational team and I believe that all moments of pedagogical practice may and should be observed. [JS, April 2007]

"Sharing one's critical reflection enriches our work and often the triad's thinking (...) For example, JL questioned me [after an activity] about the reason why I changed my seating place (...). I explained that this need had been a result of my reflection in action (...). This reflection raised another one, regarding the organisation of space. Even though this dialogue, at this stage, did not involve the cooperating teacher (...) it is an example of the confrontation of perspectives usually present in the construction of the collaborative journal (...) that has always a constructivist nature in our own development (...) my ideas are confronted with the other two's and, not seldom, they disagree. (...) building the journal has favoured not only the development of my ability to do things, but also my knowing how to be and to act." [LC, April 2007]

"The collaborative journal involves moments of reflection and of professional transformation, as we may question pedagogical action and suggest strategies to improve other activities (...). To take advantage of and to respect our colleague's and the cooperating teacher's opinions is an important aspect of every student teacher's professional development (...) Being different from the other is advantageous (...) confrontation and debate of ideas facilitates understanding and transformation of our personal and professional development processes." [JS, April 2007]

"Having a situation commented by the cooperating teacher gives us a more secure and stimulating vision to learn and to improve our actions. Our cooperating teacher is evaluative and

The student teachers' perceptions point out the importance of the supervisory role of the cooperating teacher and the institutional supervisor in the interactive discourse built in the journal, as valuable actors in their developmental processes. Reflective dialogue offers possibilities to revise action and to improve in a safe environment.

Development of attitudes of inquiry and openness to the Other

The diversity of views on the same situation (but with common goals) are perceived as advantages for the transformation of thought and action, a strong indicator of the construction of personal professional knowledge.

Construction of emancipatory practical knowledge through collaboration

The consequences of collaborative reflection are viewed as influencing the development of more profound practical knowledge. As a result, pedagogical action is more secure and student teachers feel more confident in their own skills and knowledge.

critical; she always seeks to focus on the most relevant aspects of our commentaries, gives suggestions, expresses her personal opinion and always objectifies the group's feelings [children's] that were observed in the activity." [LC, April 2007]

"(...) a reflective dialogue is also established with the institutional supervisor who confronts us with her perspective on what she read in our journal (...) she suggests improvements and raises new interpretations. This enlarged vision does not end in this teaching practice year, but helps us to reflect together and to notice the diversity of readings that our actions may have. This problematisation of an activity already commented on by the development triad opens new horizons towards an innovative and evaluative vision of the real objectives of our action." [JS, April 2007]

"Building a journal is an important strategy for our evaluation as student teachers (...). It helps in the inquiry and introspection on our educational acts and through confrontation with different perspectives (...) we discover and establish new goals for our development, we try to re-create and value the educational act and to enrich it." [JS, April 2007]

"The journal favours a deeper knowledge of the other, which is a great benefit of this strategy (...). This knowledge is a valuable contribution to our team work and to our own action, both in the sense that we work towards the same goals and as we realise the other needs help or, on the contrary, greater autonomy." [LC, April 2007]

"Our reflections on the collaborative journal make us reflect on the practical implications of our action. This has proven to be an advantage in the improvement of our pedagogical action in several ways. The difficulties we felt at the beginning were overcome, and our work is done with the same effort but with greater ease and with more knowledge and confidence (...). The development of competences of observation, reflection and critical analysis, argumentation, acceptance of the other, and transformation of reality are a real proof of the role of the collaborative journal." [LC, April 2007]

"Building knowledge through the diversity of opinion is important in our professional development (...) I seek to integrate and to improve my scientific groundings and my colleague seeks a more pragmatic approach. We exchange opinions and knowledge, which turns out to be very positive and always open to improvement." [JS, April 2007]

2. Case Study Two: enlarging professional practical-critical knowledge (Maria Alfredo)

The second case study was developed within post-graduate teacher education, in the school year of 2005/06. I was the teacher of two courses in Pedagogical Supervision, one on Observation of Teaching and Supervision Practices in Foreign Language Teaching and the other on Evaluation in Pedagogical Supervision in Foreign Language Teaching, in a Master's Programme on Pedagogical Supervision in Foreign Language Teaching. The students were 17 female foreign language teachers who live and work in the north of Portugal. Some of them were also supervisors of student teachers in initial teacher education. There was also a male foreign language university teacher that came from East Timor and worked as a supervisor.

All wrote collaborative journals, with weekly entries that had to be commented on by a person of their choice. The content of these entries needed to be related to the content of the courses: experiences, perceptions, reflections, ideas, readings... that were related to course content. Even though their journals did not have to be commented on by colleagues or teachers in the Master's programme, most chose to work this way. At the end of both courses, each student should have had 14 commented entries in her/his journal. This task counted for about 30% of their final mark in the courses.

For the purposes of this text, I will take the case of one student, Catarina. She worked in a large school in the north of Portugal. This school takes students from the 1st grade up to the 12th, with about 1000 students altogether. Catarina had been an English teacher for 14 years. She had lived and studied in Canada and in Portugal, in the University of Aveiro. She had also worked for 5 years as a supervisor in initial teacher education, supervising student teachers of English from the University of Minho. She decided to take this programme because she wanted to expand her knowledge and insights not only on supervision, but also on pedagogical issues related to foreign language teaching. She was enthusiastic about journal writing and often made more than one entry each week. Like most of her colleagues, her entries were commented on by the colleagues taking these courses⁵, and also by myself.

At the beginning of the assignment, even though Catarina acknowledges the importance of writing to keep a record of her professional path for the semester, she also anticipates constraints that have already been identified in a similar context (see Moreira, Durães & Silva, 2006). They have mostly to do with finding the time to write, but also with keeping up with the motivation to do it in a continuous way.

5 Catarina agreed to be identified in this text. Her colleagues will be identified by the initials of their names so that their anonymity can be guaranteed.

"I recognise the importance of keeping an organized record of what is going on in the classroom (...) We often rely on memory for that purpose, but it betrays us (...) When we register our memory, the subjects, the ideas, the stances and reflections take a more permanent nature (...) Is this what is expected from journal writing? I still have doubts, but I carry on with my writing. (...) How can I manage the time to write with a busy schedule? (...) How? I do not know. I only know I am writing now and I will do it whenever I can". (Catarina, 1st April)

Catarina starts to write about a pedagogy for autonomy following a critical incident with a colleague and her students when the latter, in the former's perspective, questioned the teacher's authority in the classroom. This situation led to a fiery discussion with other teachers in her school about the grades these students would get in this teachers' class.

Her reflections focus on issues of power and authority in the classroom, largely influenced by the topics discussed in the supervision courses. Catarina connects the following and other critical incidents to the constraints of implementing a pedagogy for autonomy in regular school. Some of the comments made by her colleagues and myself strive to connect these incidents to democracy and resistance in the classroom.

Writing about... 5th April

(...) There was another sentence that reminded me of how the concept of a pedagogy for autonomy is so difficult to implement (...) She said that, besides trying to cheat her, these students were questioning her authority, when they kept asking questions about class contents and pedagogical options (...). She concluded by saying that (...) 'I do not accept that students may question either my decisions or authority'. (...) I concluded (maybe hastily) that it was useless for me to suggest that she could talk to her students, consent that they should be heard (maybe their opinions were not that ridiculous), and that she could listen. (...). I gave up.

I believe many teachers still regard themselves as owners of an 'authoritarian' power which, as Vieira puts it, may be regarded as 'a pedagogy of dependence, where the maximum authority of the teacher in decision-making corresponds to the student's lack of capability to decide for him/herself the learning course.' (1998: 34). In this particular situation, I believe one may talk about a pedagogy of dependence by (explicit) will of the teacher, but the students' dependency is owed to the teacher's attitude

Commentary

Not everyone is aligned with autonomy and they do not know as we did not know, that it had an official existence, notwithstanding the fact that we practised it in our own way. Students are our single evaluators and you work for and with them. As far as your colleagues are concerned, remember our small steps, and/ but do not abdicate your attitude:

'A gentleman will walk, but never run.' says Sting in the song 'An Englishman in New York'. (AG)

and behaviour (...) Maybe this teacher could change and think that, through dialogue with her students (...), she will not cease to have *power*, no longer 'authoritarian power', but 'authoritative power' instead (Widdowson, 1987, 1999, cit. in Vieira, 1998: 115).

We cannot judge her, but maybe we can destabilise. What do you think? (GM)

And here I stand, uncertain of what to do. How far is this teacher entitled to follow her practical theories, even against the will of her students? Once more, who am I to judge?

The road to teacher and learner autonomy is not an easy one, for it is very much like 'a bumpy ride where contradictions, uncertainty, and conflicts are obstacles to be expected and overcome' (Auerbach, 2007: 87). Both Catarina and her colleagues take attitudes such as risk-taking and tolerance towards uncertainty as determining factors in the development of both teacher autonomy and learner autonomy, thus recognising the liberating and emancipatory nature of uncertainty (CD) and the feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty as part of this difficult road (Maria Alfredo) that embraces democracy and autonomy into a common endeavour.

Writing about... 25th April⁶

I start with a general idea. It has always been the same: a pedagogy for autonomy and how to promote it. (...) This "idea" has stalked me for some time now and finally I have found both the starting point and the necessary support to (try to) achieve it. With the general idea, I take notes on possible paths for development. I exchange ideas with my colleagues. More concrete ideas arise. The project starts to gain a life of its own. And it grows. (...) As it grows, so do my doubts. And today they are bigger and more damaging (...)! What can I do? (...) To reflect more, to exchange ideas with my colleagues. To read. To read a lot. But nothing seems to help, on the contrary (...) I feel frustrated, even powerless for not being able to conquer them. I believe that they must represent the learning process that

Commentary

Is it worth spending so much energy into fighting [our doubts]? Or rather should we accept them as we 'accept' a virus (a benign one, one should say), knowing that we will have a hard time but that in the end we become immune and even stronger? (Maria Alfredo)

Without Them (the Doubts) wouldn't you be accommodated as a 'captain of mouth folded' [idiomatic expression in Portuguese], whose main worry would be: 'Shall I do the test from page 10 to page 20 or 30?' (MP)

Through constant exchange of experiences, ideas, counselling, the feeling of isolation, of alienation, of disorientation, fades away. From journal to journal, from commentary to commentary, the dynamics of the journal

6 The 25th April is a political holiday in Portugal. It celebrates the Revolution in 1974, when a dictatorship was put to an end by the intervention of the military, and a parliamentary democracy was installed. Therefore the struggle, war-like metaphor used by Catarina.

people talk so much about. I am sure of it. And, if that is the case, let them come. I do not intend to defeat them but to fight with and against them. (...)

methodology makes more pertinent, more consistent sense, more coherent with the designed and intertwined goals of our professional growth (...) Autonomy and control of the teaching and learning process start a chain reaction of reflective moments. When will they stop? This question is impossible to answer... (CD)

As Tsui (2003) states, images and metaphors reveal teachers' practical knowledge. Catarina's metaphors towards a pedagogy for autonomy are war-like (see also Moreira, 2007), interpreting the road to autonomy as a struggle between ideals and reality. As Vieira and Barbosa (in this volume) put it, in their struggle for learner autonomy, teachers also struggle for their own professional autonomy, but this is usually a struggle that puts them somewhere between the world of schooling as *it is* and the world of schooling as *it should be*.

This idea is later revived by Catarina when she presents in her journal a few small case studies of students who did not show any interest in school or towards the subject and that, as the year goes by, change their attitude towards school. But instead of placing the cause of change in her students, Catarina attributes causality to herself, to changes in her practical theories, recognizing the path to autonomy as also a struggle towards democratic teaching.

"On reflection, my classes with these students make me believe, with some misery, that I did not give them enough 'room'. (...) Today I am a happier teacher. I feel that I managed to give my students small wings. I still cannot give them wings because I do not have them myself but, at least, they already can, as myself, fly a little bit. For a pedagogy for autonomy is a long process, full of doubts, of uncertainty, of constraints and obstacles and because sometimes I feel lonely in this search, I get comfort in finding that others have also gone through this and had success. Therefore, I take these words as an ideal: 'I hope always to give my students wings of possibility while I remain a larva, learning what it means to be a democratic teacher' (Poduska, 1996: 126)." (Catarina, 3rd May)

She realised, at a given point, like Shor (1992: 135), that weak democracy brings strong resistance, largely due to the students' inability to perceive purpose or community in the curriculum and to the imposition, on the part of the school and the teachers, of a single voice in the understanding and appropriation of the world. This is where a pedagogy for autonomy makes sense and a pedagogy for dependence loses ground (cf. Vieira, 1998), as teachers find themselves possessing a dream for society that is light years distant from the universe of their students (cf. Shor in Shor & Freire, 2003: 491).

Writing about... 1st May

After I read Katie Poduska's text, I reflected and tried to connect her experiences with mine. The author states that 'democratic teaching involves a total commitment and an ever-demanding focus'. Am I capable of doing this for my students? (...)

I have often believed that helping students meant providing the answers and thorough instructions to each task. This is what students expect teachers to do. I now see that I wasn't helping them. (...)

Students get used to 'receive' and do not seek, do not reflect, do not take chances. In other words, students become passive subjects, consumers, because everything is served at no effort.

Writing about... 17th May

Dammed syllabus, allied to the damned exams!! But sometimes I sense that they are scapegoats for keeping the 'status quo'. So that the teacher does not lose his/her 'beloved authority'. (...) It is urgent that we move towards a pedagogy for autonomy, where students may become creative producers of knowledge (Vieira, 1998: 38). (...)

How can we achieve this goal, so coveted by so many but so ignored by others? (...) In my case, in spite of some underlying restlessness for some time now, only when I enrolled in this post-graduate programme did I manage to become a more reflective teacher with the necessary 'courage' and support to change! Because we often lack the engine to start us, to give us the courage to face the reality and to change! But this programme did not take away my uncertainties; on the contrary, it fed them a lot (on another entry to this journal, I gave them a different name: 'doubts'), but now I am used to them. I even see it is healthy to keep (and to feed) those uncertainties, for they are my engine forward, they encourage me to seek, not to stop and fall into conformity and stillness!

Commentary

[when you] ask students to design a self-assessment instrument does not that mean giving them a voice? Isn't it promoting their awareness on the teaching and learning process? Is it not a contribution towards finding their own direction'? (EF)

Commentary

Sometimes, it is hard to resist the temptation to go with the tide (...) Everything becomes less utopian when we find others who are in the same situation and are willing to fight for what they believe in. Stillness is precisely what characterises our teaching system. The solutions presented [by the Ministry of Education] aim at camouflaging adversity (...) When we cease to have doubts, it means we have arrived at a point of unchanging stillness. (PG)

In her final evaluation of the task of journal writing, Catarina continues to use metaphors that encapsulate her knowledge on teaching and learning, now viewing this process as a 'birth', a 'delivery', a 'growth process', lined in doubts and uncertainty, but also supported by the necessary collaboration and encouragement. These are paramount in order to deal with and overcome constraints, for they favour introspection and communication with oneself, but also with the others, thus promoting awareness and sense of direction. *It is both a self and peer supervision process, aimed at developing teacher and learner autonomy as a collective endeavour*, undertaken in a non-evaluative atmosphere. In the end, it is a path to emancipation, because she is no longer alone:

"[At the beginning] I was lost, disoriented, frustrated (...) Can I call this phase the gestation phase? If it was, it was lived with much effort, many doubts, many whats and whys. (...) It was, indeed, a learning process, a personal and professional growth process. (...) I have learnt to put on paper what was in my soul; I have learnt how to reflect (more, and I hope, much better) on what I did and said; I have learnt how to interpret my behaviour and my reality; I now know better my espoused theories and my theories-in-action. I have learnt to know myself and others. Deep down, I have learnt the value of sharing and collaboration. And I have learnt that I am not alone (and never will be). (...)

It is about sharing, acknowledgement, looking into a mirror that reflects the other person but in which we also see our own reflection (...) This is what I felt in many comments on my journal: collaboration, sharing, reinforcement, encouragement, suggestions. The mirror kept telling me: 'You are not alone.'" (Catarina, 11th July)

Conclusion

The two case studies we have presented in this text seek to illustrate the construction of professional knowledge via reflective collaborative writing, from its very beginnings (with student teachers in their teaching practice year) to more advanced professional practice (with an experienced teacher in post-graduate education). The evidence collected from the analysis of the journals reveals that teachers' knowing-in-action evolves and is situational. For the beginning teachers, autonomy starts with awareness on the workings of technical-practical action, on meaning given to action, fuelled by inquiry, dialogue, and confrontation of perspectives. Their reflections are mainly of a practical orientation, thus evidencing the construction of *professional practical knowledge*. For the experienced teacher, autonomy involves an increased awareness of the purpose and implications of pedagogical action, also fuelled by the same processes, leading to an improved sense of direction. This teacher's reflections are of a more political nature and register doubt and critique of ongoing actions, thus evidencing the construction of *professional critical knowledge* (see Van Manen, 1995).

Collaborative supervision journals, as a phenomenological and hermeneutical approach to the collaborative construction of teachers' practical knowledge, challenge dominant official discourses. Therefore they provide a non-conventional context for the production of educational knowledge, taken as *the social construction of an intersubjective vision of educational reality* (see Vieira & Barbosa in this volume). Teachers are taken into a spiralling process of reconstruction, as theory is adapted to context, tested in practice, refined, and reconstructed through interaction with others (Little, 2007: 12), in a process that enhances professional autonomy. It is also a learner development process, for both the student teachers and Catarina value careful listening to children and teenagers and favour their participation in the life of the school, thus evidencing effective teaching (see Carroll & Cotterall, 2007).

According to Poduska (1996), democratic teaching involves three components: discovering and nurturing voice, developing consciousness, and claiming a new awareness. Collaborative journals favour listening to different voices: those from the readings, voices from the learners, from cooperating teachers, from institutional supervisors... and the writers' own voices as agents of self-empowerment. They favour the co-construction of professional knowledge that is built in the crossroads of different knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, and ways of being and of being with others.

Besides creating a common space where the I meets the Other and becomes Us and, in the process, feels empowered, collaborative journal writing also creates a space for a conversation in which questions are asked, contradictions are exposed, and no solutions are reached, which teaches us to live with contradiction, ambiguity, and non-closure (see McKenna, 2003: 437). It is not an easy process for us, as teacher educators struggling to become agents of empowerment, enacting a helping role that provides the participants with the safe environment they need to deal with uncertainty and move forward towards new challenges.

"Only through narrative, the telling of stories, can we document the struggles we and our students go through, or the kinds of reflection that lead to transformations that constitute learning. And the struggle, of course, only becomes an aspect of learning when we reflect on it, think about what it means for us, and formulate plans for changing our learning behaviours." (Carroll & Cotterall, 2007: 163)

As we strive to integrate teaching, learning and supervision in our professional practice, in a continuous struggle to uncover, challenge and manage constraints, we are often faced with *cultural resistance* from several sources, ranging from the dominant culture of schooling as transmission, the dominant culture of teacher education as technical instruction, or the dominant culture of research as production of academic, generalisable knowledge (Vieira & Moreira, 2008). However, we are also aware that the struggle between the ideal and the possible,

entangles both personal freedom and social responsibility, both power and empowerment or, better still, power to empower (Vieira, Barbosa, Paiva & Fernandes, 2008).

However, like Greene (2003: 338/9), it is also clear to us that there are dangers in this approach:

“When the agent of empowerment assumes to be already empowered, and so apart from those who are to be empowered, arrogance can underlie claims of ‘what we can do for you.’ This danger is apparent both in the work of the teacher who is to empower students, and in the work of the academics whose discourse is purportedly empowering for the teachers (and others). In the focus on Others there is a danger of forgetting to examine one’s own (or one’s group’s) implication in the condition one seeks to effect.” (Greene, 2003: 338)

By focusing too much on the Other, we may forget what the purpose for collaborative journals is – to develop both learner and teacher autonomy within an emancipatory and democratic view of education that puts collaboration among learners, teachers and supervisors on centre-stage (see Vieira in this volume). In spite of the bumps on the road, we believe that the collaborative journal is a valuable strategy for self and peer supervision of the process of (re)constructing teachers’ professional knowledge. That is why we also engage in it with our students, so that we won’t forget it is necessary, not to function as all-knowing, silent interrogators, but as hooks advocates (1994: 21) to look at ourselves in the mirror, practice being vulnerable and being wholly present in mind, body, and spirit.

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Task-based English language teaching and learning – evaluating the impact of tasks on students

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Introduction

“What I enjoyed the most was sharing our final task, besides being the most amusing moment, in my opinion, it is also the part when we get to lift the weight from our shoulders.”

(A student telling about his favourite moment during a language learning task)

How can we make sure that our students will learn the language and at the same time learn how to keep on learning it when we are no longer there for them? This text describes our struggle for learner (and teacher) autonomy in language education through an ongoing project based on a task-based approach (TBA) that includes the evaluation of task impact on students' communicative and learning competences as well as their beliefs and opinions both on the language strategies promoted through tasks and on task-based learning itself. The project has involved work with student teachers at the University of the Azores since 1998, and also with experienced teachers in in-service courses and within the GT-PA Task-Based Approach Group¹, which was set up in 2003. The sub-project we will present in more detail was developed within this group in 2006.

Firstly, we briefly introduce the whole project, including the participants' roles and their collaborative efforts to promote students' autonomy and help them learn together. Then, we share our *reflection for action* on TBA and the micro-evaluation of tasks, which refers to the process of investigating the impact of specific tasks on learners in a specific teaching/ learning context. We will refer to some relevant literature in the field, the reasons that led us to experiment with TBA in our work context and our methodological choices, highlighting the relationship between teacher and learner autonomy. Afterwards, we describe our *action* through micro-evaluation action research projects, describing one of these in detail. We also discuss some implications as well as obstacles we have met as regards both research and the dissemination of TBA. We thus engage in *reflection on action*, highlighting some advantages and shortcomings of our proposals,

¹ This group is coordinated by Margarida Castro and focuses on the development of a task-based approach towards learner autonomy. It is part of the nationwide Working Group-Pedagogy for Autonomy (GT-PA - Grupo de Trabalho-Pedagogia para a Autonomia), coordinated by Flávia Vieira since 1997 at the University of Minho.