TEACHER DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY FOR AUTONOMY IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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A lot of research has been done on the area of learner autonomy in language education, but a lot remains to be done on teacher development towards a pedagogy for autonomy in the school context. The paper articulates teacher and learner development within the same framework, by exploring the relationship between reflective teacher education and a pedagogy for autonomy. Both orientations see education as a process of empowerment, where the goal of personal growth is combined with the aim of social reconstruction.

A framework for the in-service development of FL teachers towards a pedagogy for autonomy is suggested. The proposal is inquiry-oriented and classroom-based, and is organized around five leading questions: how does teacher development relate to pedagogy?, what sort of language teacher are you?, what do you know about a pedagogy for autonomy?, how can you move towards a pedagogy for autonomy?, and how can you get other teachers involved?

Introduction

"The idea of autonomy is fundamental to liberal philosophies of education, which see the central goal of schooling as the development of independent minds and hence of a capacity for independent action." (Little, 1997: 35)

When we accept the legitimacy and the validity of autonomy as a pedagogical goal, we must necessarily turn our attention to choices in teacher education, for these partially determine the quality of life in schools, as well as the relationship between life in school and the wider social context.

A lot has been said and done on the area of learner-centredness in language education, but not as much has been said or done about teacher
development towards such a pedagogical approach. This paper concerns the professional development of teachers towards a pedagogy for autonomy in the foreign language classroom and rests upon the assumption that there is a close interplay between reflective teaching and a pedagogy for autonomy. This was the basic working hypothesis to set up an in-service EFL teacher development project back in 1993, carried out at the University of the Minho between 1993 and 1996, by a team of university researchers/trainers and a group of EFL school teachers (Vieira & Moreira, 1993-96). The main challenge to this project was to articulate teacher and learner development within the same framework, by exploring the relationship between reflective teaching and learner autonomy (see Fig. 1). The program was inquiry-oriented (Zeichner, 1983) and classroom-based, involving the teachers in the design, implementation and evaluation of action-research projects which operationalized the "pedagogy for autonomy" concept. Autonomy was broadly set as a goal and defined after Henri Holec (1981) as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". A pedagogy for autonomy, as opposed to a pedagogy of dependence (Vieira, 1996a; 1997b), should seek to develop this ability in the learner, in an intentional and systematic way.

It is not the aim of this paper to describe the project (see Vieira, 1996b, forthcoming) or to discuss approaches to learner autonomy in any detail, but rather to suggest a framework for in-service teacher development programs, largely derived from our research in the field, which assumes the interconnectedness between reflective teaching and the autonomy approach.

Reflective teaching and learner autonomy

Research on teacher education over the last decade reflects a growing focus on reflective teaching (and reflective teacher education) as opposed to a tradition of technical rationality. On the other hand, there has been, in language education research, a parallel orientation towards learner-centredness, integrating different trends like humanistic teaching, the communicative approach, psycholinguistic research on learning strategies, individualized learning, the negotiated process syllabus, cooperative learning, and self-directed learning.

Despite the diversity of approaches to teacher reflection (Calderhead, 1989; Adler, 1991; Zeichner, 1993, 1994) and learner-centredness (see Tudor, 1996), both orientations tend to produce liberatory discourses of education (Gilbert, 1994), where teaching and learning can be thought of as "reflective conversation with the situation" (Schön, 1993) and school is assigned a transformative role in society. Teachers and learners are supposed to develop
an attitude of inquiry towards knowledge and the social contexts where it is constructed, to explore personal theories and practices through processes of awareness-raising, interpretation and confrontation, and to take gradual control over their own courses of action. There is, on both sides, an acceptance of a metaphor of the individual as a producer, not a passive consumer, of knowledge and of the learning process (Zeichner, 1983; Holec, 1981), and also an increasing awareness of the need to turn education into a process of empowerment, where the goal of personal growth is combined with the aim of social reconstruction. This common ideological stance at the level of basic assumptions and goals reflects itself at the levels of principles and facilitating conditions for action, as well as on the definition of pedagogical roles in the classroom.

The general principles of reflective teacher education are largely based upon an epistemology of practice (see Schön, 1987) and can be applied to a pedagogy for autonomy: (a) focussing on the individual, so that curricula and educational practices should be built from personal needs and theories, (b) focussing on development processes - particularly on critical reflection and experimentation - and not only on outcomes, (c) inquiring about knowledge and practices in order to develop the abilities to describe-inform-confront-reconstruct personal theories and action, (d) integrating theory and practice by valuing the role of experience-derived knowledge, and (e) promoting introspective reflection. (Vieira, 1997a)

Although context-sensitiveness is a characteristic of both reflective teacher education and a pedagogy for autonomy, which means that practical approaches are flexible at the level of methodology, some common facilitating conditions can be pointed out, like the need (a) to integrate content and process dimensions of education, (b) to make educational assumptions, aims and procedures explicit, (c) to combine reflective and experimental educational tasks, (d) to promote the negotiation of meanings and decisions among participants, and (e) to encourage collaborative modes of inquiry (Vieira, op. cit.).

Finally, at the level of pedagogical roles and underlying competences, three basic concepts seem to be equally relevant for reflective teaching and learning for autonomy: information, negotiation and regulation (Vieira, 1994). Information includes substantive, procedural and contextual knowledge which is personally constructed and not just received from sources of authority. Teachers and learners are seen as critical consumers and creative producers of knowledge and teachers should facilitate a dynamic approximation of the learner to the learning situation. Through negotiation, of meanings and decisions, teachers and learners act as co-managers and co-activators of learning: active communicators, analysts of language, managers of learning tasks, managers of tensions, problem-solvers, resources, counsellors, etc.. Within this low demarcation of roles, the question is not whether the teacher
loses authority or becomes redundant, but rather how the teacher's authority can be built up from the learner's authority and vice-versa. Interdependence seems to be the key-word here: independence and social responsibility are articulated; personal needs or expectations are constantly reframed and redefined within the group. Regulation is the means whereby teachers and learners become explorers and researchers of their own action, in order to monitor, evaluate, change or confirm previous ideas and practices. With a systematic focus on learning contexts and on cultural, institutional or methodological tensions, teachers and learners become aware of the complexities of teaching and learning and are co-responsible for instructional decision-making.

As a whole, this conception of pedagogical roles presupposes an interpretative view of schooling and an exploratory view of pedagogical communication (Barnes, 1976), thus emphasizing the emancipatory potential of formal educational contexts.

So far, it has been suggested that reflective teacher education/practice and autonomous learner education can converge in significant ways due to the existence of homologous assumptions, goals, principles, facilitating conditions and pedagogical roles. This is the basic argument to propose a reflective orientation in programs designed to prepare teachers for a pedagogy for autonomy, which is the subject of the next section.

A framework for reflective teacher development towards a pedagogy for autonomy

The framework proposed on Table 1 for in-service reflective teacher development towards a pedagogy for autonomy in the foreign language classroom (Vieira, 1997b) assumes the existence of a formal training program, where one or more trainers, possibly university researchers, work with a group of voluntary school teachers on a collaborative basis. The framework is based on a set of leading questions, assumptions, guidelines and tasks, and should be taken as an exploratory skeleton curricular proposal. Depending on the training context, its practical application may take several forms and is not supposed to be linear. There is, however, a suggested sequence, that starts with reflection on approaches to teacher education and school pedagogy, goes on to preparing teachers for action-research, then moves to implementing innovation through action-research, and ends with reporting on action-research processes and outcomes. I will comment on each of the five leading questions in order to clarify their rationale and implications, hoping to raise some issues that might be of interest in exploring the framework.
### TABLE 1.
A framework for in-service teacher development Towards a pedagogy for autonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADING QUESTIONS, ASSUMPTIONS, GUIDELINES</th>
<th>SUGGESTED TASKS</th>
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</table>
| **1. How does teacher development relate to pedagogy?**  
*Only a teacher-centred approach to teacher training can foster a learner-centred approach to teaching!*  
Present the rationale for a reflective approach to teacher training: assumptions, guiding principles, constraints. Contrast it with other teacher training models (craft model; applied science model). Relate training models to pedagogical implications. | - exploring relevant questions on teacher training (theoretical, technical, ethical)  
-discussing the emancipatory power of a reflective approach  
- identifying practical constraints  
- clarifying concepts: teacher-centredness/learner-centredness  
- creating a metalanguage  
- providing a select bibliography (…) |
| **2. What sort of language teacher are you?**  
To head somewhere, you have to know where you stand!  
Make teachers aware of their own theories and practices, of their professional beliefs and dilemmas. Where do they come from? How can they be interpreted? What social values do they embody? What power relationships do they assume? | - exploring relevant questions on personal teaching approaches (theoretical, technical, ethical)  
- uncovering personal theories  
- describing teaching practices  
- scrutinizing procedures, tasks & materials (observation, content analysis,…)  
- identifying professional needs  
- clarifying concepts: teaching & learning  
- creating a metalanguage  
- providing a select bibliography (…) |
3. What do you know about a pedagogy for autonomy (PA)?
*Autonomy is not a utopian pedagogical goal!*

Provide information about a PA: what it is and how it differs from other current approaches (for e.g., CLT); how it can be facilitated; what it means for the teacher; what experiments have been conducted all over the world; what are the contextual constraints to be considered; how you can adjust it to your own situation.

4. How can you move towards a pedagogy for autonomy?
*To learn it, do it!*

Prepare teachers for action-research: what it is and how it relates to teaching. Give teachers support in designing and implementing small-scale action-research projects in their own classes. Help them evaluate processes and outcomes.

5. How can you get other teachers involved?
*Let others hear your own voice!*

Encourage publishing and participation in professional meetings. Encourage collaborative action among teachers.

| -exploring relevant questions on a PA (theoretical, technical, ethical) |
| -confronting a PA with personal theories & practices |
| -scrutinizing procedures, tasks & materials (observation, content analysis,...) |
| -clarifying concepts: PA |
| -creating a metalanguage |
| -providing a select bibliography (…) |

| -exploring relevant questions on action-research (theoretical, technical, ethical) |
| -designing pedagogical projects within a PA |
| -monitoring teaching & learning within a PA |
| -evaluating processes & outcomes of a PA |
| -clarifying concepts: teacher as researcher/PA |
| -creating a metalanguage |
| -providing a select bibliography (…) |

| -writing reports of action-research projects |
| -presenting / comparing results |
| -sharing ideas and materials in schools |
| -involving peers in collaborative inquiry |
| -joining professional groups and associations (…) |
Question 1: How does teacher development relate to pedagogy?

The relationship between professional development and school pedagogy should be a crucial area of reflection within any teacher development program, the assumption here being that only a teacher-centred approach to teacher development can foster a learner-centred approach to teaching.

Underlying the reflective approach is a metaphor of liberation, as opposed to a metaphor of production which underlies technical orientations to teacher education (Zeichner, 1983). Liberation - which means that teachers become the authors of their own practice and professional development, as well as active agents of social reconstruction, - can be enhanced through the enactment of two basic criteria: (1) teachers are viewed as active participants in the construction of the curricular content of training programs; and (2) an inquiring attitude is fostered towards existing institutionalized arrangements. These criteria are hard to find in teacher education programs, where a view of training as the accumulation and application of scientific knowledge deriving from academic research is more in agreement with prevailing educational ideologies inherited from 19th century positivism that reinforce "a radical separation of the world of the academy from the world of practice, according to which the academy holds a monopoly on research, which is considered to be out of place in practice" (Schön, 1993: 5). Teachers tend to become disempowered executors of the laws and principles of effective teaching, their competence being measured by pre-specified performance criteria.

Only a reflective approach to teacher education, based on a metaphor of liberation and having the emancipation of teachers as a major aim, can claim to encourage teachers to think of education as a liberating endeavour, where learner autonomy is conceived as a broad goal within a philosophy of individual and social transformation. This, of course, means that if autonomy is not a goal of teacher education, we may well be wasting our time and effort in trying to make it a goal of learner education (see Little, 1995).

The practical exploration of Question 1 should involve the teachers in an analysis of the rationale, potential value and pedagogical implications of a reflective approach to teacher education, as compared to other approaches and to their own experience as developing professionals. The diversity of theoretical perspectives on what constitutes "reflective teaching" or "reflective teacher education" should potentially enrich rather than limit an analysis of what it means and of what its consequences are. If "reflection is best thought of as ongoing conversation" open to continuing discourse (Adler, 1991:148), one of the aims of teacher education programs should be both to initiate teachers in this discourse and to promote their full engagement in its elaboration.
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Question 2: What sort of language teacher are you?

The second component of the framework relates to how teachers interpret their own theories and practices, the assumption being that to head somewhere, you have to know where you stand.

A teacher-centred approach to professional development should involve teachers in describing their own action, uncovering implicit beliefs and confronting professional priorities, so that an awareness-raising process develops within which practice is theorised, evaluated, and possibly reconstructed (Smyth, 1989). This process of reading one’s own pedagogy involves an analysis of ideational, operational, ideological and managerial components of practice (Prahbu, 1995). Examples of particular tasks include identifying and deconstructing relevant pedagogical questions, applying analytical criteria to pedagogical procedures, identifying assumptions underlying teaching routines, or challenging taken-for-granted ideas. At this stage, the teachers’ input should become the main source of debate, and conditions should be created for them to scrutinize their own practical theories, not in order to realize how right or wrong they are, but primarily to become aware of their assumptions and implications, and to adopt an attitude of inquiry towards foreign language pedagogy in general, and their own pedagogical approach in particular. The identification of professional needs and dilemmas, and of constraints to innovation, is a usual outcome of this awareness process, which gives priority to the teachers' agenda, therefore meeting a central criterion of reflective teacher education.

Question 3: What do you know about a pedagogy for autonomy?

The assumption that autonomy is not a utopian pedagogical goal reveals a major preoccupation in making teachers aware that autonomy is neither an absolute concept nor a completely innovative idea in education which radically changes current views and practices. It also reveals a concern with two major research-driven characteristics of a pedagogy for autonomy (see Holec, 1988) - flexibility and context-sensitiveness: “the how is locally constructable, the why is inalienable” (Candlin, 1997: xiii).

Information on theoretical models and pedagogical experiments, along with a comparative analysis of current teaching trends, seems to be crucial at this stage, where personal theories and practices are further challenged and compared to public theories (Griffiths & Tann, 1992).

A critical analysis of pedagogical documents, including those designed for an autonomy approach, is necessary in order to identify basic components
within a pedagogy for autonomy, like metalinguistic and process awareness, metacognitive knowledge and skills, strategic learning and pro-active attitudes (Wenden, 1991). In exercising analytic skills, teachers will become more aware of the practical theory underlying a pedagogy for autonomy, i.e., of its theoretical, practical and ethical justifications (Handal & Lauvas, 1987).

The refusal to see autonomy as a utopia does not mean to impart the idea that there is a safe route to a desired outcome. Not only are there problems with the conceptual and operational definitions of the autonomy approach, but also risks and tensions within its practical implementation. Teachers should become aware of both, which means that a critical stance is encouraged, whereby a view of autonomy as a "promised land" is avoided through a look at conflicts and uncertainties, dilemmas and constraints.

Conceptual and operational problems relate to the way autonomy is defined and implemented. An analysis of studies on learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom reveals that "autonomy" is a complex and transitional concept. There appear to be at least three basic definitions of autonomy, corresponding broadly to its technical, psychological and political dimensions (Benson, 1997: 25):

1. autonomy as the act of learning on one's own and the technical ability to do so;
2. autonomy as the internal psychological capacity to self-direct one's own learning;
3. autonomy as control over the content and processes of one's own learning.

Only the third is a truly political definition of autonomy as self-determination, although most experiments have tended to operationalize the first two (see, e.g., Little, 1988; The British Council's DTE Development Package on Learner Training, File 3, 1989). This relates to one of the risks within the approach, the "depolitization" of the autonomy concept (see Benson, 1996, 1997; Benson & Voller, 1997), which apparently reduces a pedagogy for autonomy to its technical and psychological dimensions, thus denying pedagogy a true emancipatory power. Whether or not this is really the case, and I'm not sure it is, we should bear in mind that the politics of autonomy is not only about learner-centredness, but also about anti-authoritarianism. Ambiguities arise from two basic tensions then: "on the one hand, between responsibility and freedom from constraint; and on the other, between the individual and the social" (Benson & Voller, op.cit.: 5). How to reconcile these elements is a basic issue of debate, when we do not want to lose sight of the sociocultural implications of a pedagogy for autonomy. The issue, then, is whether autonomy is primarily
conceived as an instrumental capacity for independent learning, or rather as an emancipatory capacity for interdependent learning, or both.

Other major issues make the agenda of current discussion of the autonomy approach: the issue of ethnocentrism, i.e., is autonomy a culture-specific concept? (see Riley, 1988; Pennycook, 1997); the issue of the canonization of didactic discourse, i.e., is it possible to have one valid model for implementing autonomy?; the related issue of the fossilization of practical models i.e., how can we prevent the autonomy approach from being attached to a set of taken-for-granted didactic procedures?; the issue of endoctrination, i.e., is autonomy a teachable curriculum subject?; the issue of loss of identity, i.e., how can teachers and learners not lose their identity as changes in the distribution of power within the learning process take place? (see Voller, 1997); and, also, the issue of delusion (see Breen & Mann, 1997), i.e., do we really know what we are aiming at, and are we really aware of the complexity of our task, or are we just constructing self-reassuring appearances of what in fact are mitigated versions of a pedagogy of dependence?

All these dilemmas bear implications upon choices at the practical level, which must, first of all, seem plausible to the teacher, since plausibility is a basic request for teachers and learners to make sense of whatever they do. It is to the question of implementation that we will now turn our attention to.

Question 4: How can you move towards a pedagogy for autonomy?

This question relates to the classroom-based stage in the framework, also the longer one, where the tasks of research and teaching meet. It is not just a question of imposing research on teaching, but rather of viewing teaching itself as a form of inquiry and experimentation (Elliot, 1991). The assumption is basically experiential: To learn it, do it.

Within the proposal, this means the preparation of teachers for action-research and the collaborative design and implementation of small-scale research projects with the common aim to develop learner autonomy in the classroom. Because action-research is inquiry-oriented and contextualized, it meets the aims and principles of a reflective approach to teacher education. Furthermore, as it is both teacher-centred and learner-centred, it can serve the aims of both teacher and learner development, i.e., it is a highly appropriate strategy to engage teachers in reflective practice within a pedagogy for autonomy.

The preparation of teachers for action-research requires their involvement in an analysis of the tasks of teaching and research, their differences and convergence, the role of the teacher-researcher, the features
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and appropriateness of different action-research modes, the steps involved in
the action-research cycle, the range of data-collection techniques, the situational
constraints, etc. It also means the active collaboration of the trainers, now acting
primarily as counsellors or consultants, and ideally of peers too, in designing
the teachers' projects, mainly in helping to clarify their purpose, identifying
alternative strategies, choosing, adapting or constructing instruments, and
planning evaluation strategies.

Although projects can be carried out by individual teachers and
supervised on a personalized basis, the existence of a common framework of
basic assumptions, aims and strategies appears to be a determining factor in
maintaining the participants' affective and cognitive involvement, and also a
sense of direction within the whole group. Trainers can play an important role
here, in systematizing on-going work and theorising from it, without losing track
of individual progress.

Most of the problems felt by teachers during action-research tend to
relate to a central dilemma: how can the demands of action-research with a
focus on learner autonomy be reconciled with constraints such as institutional
pressures, syllabuses requirements, time available, etc.? This dilemma is
especially relevant when there is a centralized educational policy combined with
a teacher-centred school tradition, as is frequently the case. Personal and group
support, both psychological and methodological, is of extreme relevance in
promoting self-confidence and identifying context-sensitive routes. Again, the
teachers' input is the basis for collaborative reflection and decision-making.

Since the teachers' engagement in action-research projects has a
twofold purpose- teacher development and learner development- evaluation
should focus on both teacher and learner growth, involving the collection and
triangulation of data from all participants. Although each project is evaluated
by the teacher(s) who carry it out, individual reports constitute an excellent data-
base for an evaluation of the group's work as a whole, so that a more complete
and critical perspective is achieved. Again, trainers can act as digesters in
highlighting main features arising from different projects and confronting
outcomes with the initial common framework of assumptions, aims and
strategies. Working from the teachers' input in this way seems to be a productive
bottom-up strategy to carry out a meta-analysis of their work and thus facilitate
the collaborative (re)construction of pedagogical knowledge.

Question 5: How can you get other teachers involved?

Let others hear your own voice, such is the assumption underlying the
need to stop teachers from living in "professional quarentine" (Rubin, 1989).
Training programs should help teachers realize the value of their own voice as professionals and encourage them to make themselves heard within the educational community, through both the dissemination of results and further engagement in project-like activities. As teachers are quite often aware of the low status of their own voice, they tend to adopt a defensive strategy and resist public exposure. However, when there is a support group where professional knowledge is built from experience as happens within collaborative action-research, self-assertiveness and self-confidence are expected to arise, along with a sense of empowerment and a willingness to share one’s work with others.

Having a voice in the professional community requires having access to different metalanguages and developing an ability to translate them into one another. In our framework, the term "metalanguage" refers to a set of negotiated, co-constructed meanings, primarily related to concepts within a pedagogical approach that aims at the development of learner autonomy. Different teachers may hold different assumptions, beliefs or priorities but, as members of a professional community, they should possess the linguistic tools that enable them to confront perspectives and achieve intersubjective understandings, with a sense of both individual freedom and social responsibility.

Conclusion

The main argument of this paper is that teacher and learner development can be productively articulated within the same framework. A strong perception of the mutual implication of reflective teaching and learner autonomy is assumed, so that teachers and learners become involved in a process of autonomization, thus feeling more empowered to take charge of their own course of action. Some elements in the proposed framework for in-service teacher development programs can be pointed out as crucial (Vieira, 1997b):

a. The adoption of a reflective orientation to teacher education, with a focus on processes of description, interpretation, confrontation and reconstruction of personal theories and practices;

b. The enactment of reflection and experimentation through action-research, where negotiation and collaboration among participants maintains affective and cognitive involvement;

c. The integration of teaching and research aims and processes, whereby teaching becomes a sort of research, and research becomes a way of teaching;
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d. The integration of bottom-up/top-down training strategies, that is, a combination of trainee-direction with trainer-direction, according to perceived needs and aims, within a negotiative atmosphere where both parties perceive relevant gains;

e. The collaboration between universities and schools as partners in the (re)construction of pedagogical knowledge and the innovation of school practices.

One of the criticisms of the reflective approach in teacher education programs is that it runs the risk of meaning anything at all, provided there is a reflection component in it. What does it mean to develop reflectivity as "a megacompetence of the teaching profile" (Angulo et al., 1994)? More specifically, we should ask what it is that teachers should be reflecting about, or what criteria they should use to distinguish acceptable from unacceptable educational practices, or whether and to what extent their decisions and action should incorporate a critique of the institutional and social settings. (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1991). There are reasons to believe that the development of learner autonomy, within an interpretative view of education and a constructivist view of learning, (1) represents a legitimate and valid subject for teacher reflection, (2) provides legitimate and valid criteria to evaluate the acceptability of educational practices, and (3) necessarily entails, at least to some extent, a critique of the institutional and social contexts of teaching and learning.
References

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