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## **Pre-service language teachers' development of appropriate pedagogies: A transition from insightful critiques to educational insights**

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This paper examines how pre-service teachers of Portuguese developed ideas about contextually appropriate pedagogies during their practicum as well as what they perceived as the impact of their pedagogical practices on student learning. The findings suggest that teacher education models which promote conscious critical reflection and teacher agency, and provide space for trainees to engage constructively both with their peers and with students are likely to generate innovative ideas for teaching which are appropriate to the specific contexts within which trainees teach.

Keywords: context-appropriate pedagogies; pre-service teacher education; first language education; Brazil.

### **1. Introduction**

An increasing number of studies (e.g. Avalos, 2011; Bolitho, 2016; Mann & Edge, 2013; Sanchez, 2013) have recognised the cognitive, emotional and social factors that impact on teachers' sense- and decision-making processes. Such studies also agree that beginning to teach is a particularly complex stage of teachers' professional lives which needs institutional and human support of different sorts (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2005). As a result, teacher education programmes which constitute an important means of support for beginning teachers (Diaz Maggioli, 2012; Wright, 2010) are increasingly being required to prepare teachers to be able to foresee eventual challenges in classroom practice and to be imaginative and skilful in addressing these challenges (Avalos, 2000; United Nations Educational, Scientific And Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1998). Not surprisingly, therefore, recent literature on teacher education (e.g. Bolitho, 2016; Boon & Lewthwaite, 2015) has emphasised the need to re-examine traditional transmission approaches to pre-service teacher education (PRESETT) and to focus on the processes through which beginning teachers develop knowledge and skills as they build their informed understandings of effective

teaching (Wright, 2010). Underlying this is also the need for research which seeks to understand how teachers learn in order to develop teacher education curricula and practices which help beginning teachers to learn how to learn (Torres, 1996). The study reported in this paper contributes to this tradition of research by investigating how trainee teachers conceptualise their pedagogical contexts during their practicum and how this shapes their thinking and pedagogical actions.

Stuart and Tatto (2000) report that there has been a worldwide trend towards specifying what teachers will know and be able to do at the end of their initial preparation. This has led to two observable models of PRESETT. On the one hand is the traditional training-transmission model of teacher education (Borg, 2015; Diaz Maggioli, 2012) which is based on a behaviourist view of knowledge. Such a model focuses primarily on the technical aspects of learning, teaching and management (Hayes, 1997) and aims to develop skills that can be individually assessed (Stuart & Tatto, 2000). Johnson (2006) explains that this perspective of teacher education is historically grounded in the positivist paradigm and structured around the assumption that trainees could learn about the subject content they are expected to teach, then observe other 'expert' teachers, practise in the teaching practicum and develop pedagogical expertise in the learned skill. Bolitho (2016) suggests, however, that a weakness of this approach to PRESETT is that methodology is often taught as a theoretical discipline detached from the practical experience that would support trainee teachers in their school practice. Where theory and practice are integrated, training-transmission oriented cultures might continue to promote practicum experiences based on the simple copying of ritual behaviour (Edge, 2011; Maingay, 1988) from more experienced teachers. While this is likely to cause educational stagnation (Bolitho, 2016), there is documented evidence of the value of passing on tried and trusted teaching traditions to next generations of teachers (Edge, 2011; Mann & Edge, 2013). Erkmen (2013), for example, shows how trainee teachers, shadowing an experienced teacher, gain understanding of new techniques through a process of scaffolding which enables them to make informed decisions of what to emulate.

On the other hand, new insights into professional learning have led to a shift from transmission to development-constructivist models of teacher education. These models emphasise the value of the social and institutional contexts in which teachers learn to teach and their prior knowledge, beliefs and experiences (Crandall, 2000; Freeman, 2002; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004) on their learning and decision making. Goodwin (2010) suggests that the development of quality teachers relies on the development of five main knowledge domains which include personal knowledge,

contextual knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, sociological knowledge and social knowledge. These different knowledge domains influence, and are influenced by, experiences in context and they inform both constructivist and socio-constructivist approaches to teacher education. In fact, it is now clear that studying the content and pedagogy of a discipline does not ipso facto translate into appropriate teaching practices. Social construction of good practices which build on all knowledge domains, as opposed to handing down recommended practices, is now being encouraged, resulting in the mapping of research concepts like reflective practice (Griffiths, 2000; Lockhart & Richards, 1994), action research (Edge, 2001) and exploratory practice (Allwright & Hanks, 2009), all of which legitimize teachers' knowledge and highlight the importance of reflective inquiry into the experiences of teachers as mechanisms for change in classroom practice (Johnson, 2006).

At the heart of these research orientations is the assumption that the ethnocentricity of North-generated pedagogical ideas and practices may not always be appropriate in contexts in the global South. A number of studies (e.g., Bertoncino, Murph, & Wang, 2002; Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014; O'Sullivan, 2002) have suggested that a range of challenges, such as large under-resourced classes, faced by educational systems in developing world countries might significantly affect the implementation of pedagogical practices promoted elsewhere. As a result, there is a growing need for teacher education programmes to train teachers capable of generating innovative ideas that are grounded in the realities of their specific working contexts (Kuchah, in press). Drawing from studies which emphasise the need for pedagogical approaches to emerge from, and respond to, changes in society, the immediate environment, the learners and the teachers (Bax, 2003; Holliday, 1994; Kuchah, 2016; Rubdy, 2008), this paradigm shift sees the developing teacher as a decision maker, autonomous professional and a reflective practitioner (Stuart & Tatto, 2000). Kumaravadivelu (2001) proposes three pedagogic parameters - *particularity*, *practicality* and *possibility* - for re-orienting language pedagogy. The *pedagogy of particularity* stresses the need for practitioners to become aware of the specific backgrounds and needs of their learners; engaging in a continual cycle of observation, reflection, and action is thus a prerequisite for the development of context-sensitive pedagogical knowledge. The *pedagogy of practicality* seeks to equate the importance of practitioners' and academics' theories by empowering teachers to 'theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize' (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 59). Kumaravadivelu (2001, p. 541) argues that 'no theory of practice can be useful and usable unless it is generated through practice.... it is the practicing teacher who, given adequate tools for exploration, is best suited to

produce such a practical theory'. The *pedagogy of possibility* links language teaching and social transformation by drawing from 'the socio-political consciousness that students bring with them to the classroom' (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 59). Central to Kumaravadivelu's ideas is the perception of practitioners as active sense makers capable of generating knowledge from their understanding of the macro and micro contexts in which they interact with colleagues and learners.

In this respect, schools and classrooms have been seen as communities of practice (Haneda, 2006; Wenger, 1998) where individual teacher knowledge can be co-constructed through continuous engagement with peers and students. Studies that have looked at mentoring (e.g. Harrison, Dymoke, & Pell, 2006; Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2010; Sundli, 2007) have mainly focused on the role and contribution of mentors to trainee identity formation and professional learning. Those that have examined trainee teachers' learning processes (e.g. Cajkler & Wood, 2016; Cheng, Tang, & Cheng, 2012; Erkmen, 2013; John, 2000; Tang, Wong, & Cheng, 2012; Vujičić, Boneta, & Ivkovic, 2015) have observed varying models of professional intuition, thinking and learning. These models are reflected in what Edge (2011) refers to as the interacting roles of copying, applying, theorising, reflecting and acting. Erkmen (2013), for example, shows how trainee teachers shadowing an experienced teacher gain understanding of new techniques through a process of scaffolding which enables them to make informed decisions of what to emulate. Vujičić et al. (2015) and Cajkler and Wood (2016) highlight the impact of a research-based reflective approach to practice on student-teachers' development of (self-) reflective competencies. The process through which these competencies are developed are initiated by trainers and mutually constructed with trainees and their mentors. While mutual construction of pedagogical knowledge around practical lessons might be a useful way of helping future teachers' observation and reflection skills, there is a danger that trainer-guided reflections might lead to illusory consensus and uncritical acceptance of others' opinions (Vujičić et al., 2015). Studies by Tang et al. (2012) and Cheng et al. (2012) examine the professional learning of trainee teachers from a constructivist perspective and show how factors such as hands on experiences in the field, social interactions with peers and critical reflections on the theory-practice praxis help them develop a conception of teaching and learning, and shape their decisions in practice. The studies cited here represent a continuum from transmission-based to constructivist-based models of teacher learning and include the concept of learning as 'an embodiment of knowledge generation evolving from a process of reflection' (Gunashekar, 2016, p. 16). Diaz Maggioli (2012, p. 13) identifies four traditions of teacher learning, two of

which are relevant to this study, namely the 'think and learn' and 'participate and learn' traditions. The former, like Kumaradivelu's (2001) notion of *practicality*, expects trainees to become researchers of their own practice and to reflect on the effects that teaching has on learning. The latter tradition is based on the sociocultural perspective of learning which encompasses the development of professional knowledge, personal knowledge and community knowledge in the training process. Both traditions are rooted in the constructivist model of teacher education which emphasises the importance of developing PRESETT practicum experiences which draw on the connections between thinking and doing and reflecting in learning to become teachers (Mann & Edge, 2013; Schön, 1983). As Wright (2010) suggests, discussions about trainees' learning processes heighten awareness of the need for research on learning to teach, teaching and learning in classrooms.

The study reported in this paper was based on the constructivist approach to teacher education and explored the process through which four pre-service teachers of Portuguese developed educational insights for context-appropriate pedagogical practices from their critical reflections on their institutional practicum contexts. The four teachers were trained in the same institution but were assigned to different schools for their practicum, each with its own institutional specificities. The curriculum of the training institution was designed around the *think and learn* and *participate and learn* traditions (Diaz Maggioli, 2012) and sought to develop critical reflection around theory and practice. The study focused on the practicum phase of their training and investigated trainees' enculturation into the practices of the community of teachers and learners as well as how they reinterpreted and reconstructed pedagogical practices from their ongoing reflection on, and understanding of, the contextual exigencies and needs of their students (Johnson, 2009). To achieve this, the study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do pre-service language teachers develop ideas about contextually appropriate pedagogies?
- What is the perceived impact of these pedagogies on students' learning experiences?

## **2. The study**

The results reported in this paper are part of a larger investigation into the pedagogical experiences and cognitive development of pre-service teachers of Portuguese during their teaching placements in state sector schools located in peripheral urban areas in São Paulo, Brazil. The project was conducted within the 'Programa Institucional de Bolsa de Iniciação à Docência' (PIBID), a national

initiative in Brazil to promote teacher recruitment and encourage undergraduate students to pursue a career in teaching. Student teachers are thus funded to remain in one single school for their practicum for at least one academic year under the supervision of a local, qualified, in-service school teacher. The participants for this study were selected through convenience sampling. Out of 30 pre-service teachers undertaking the PIBID programme, four agreed to participate (Carmen, Rafael, Giselle and Edna, pseudonyms). They were all Brazilians, spoke Portuguese as a first language, and were completing a five-year undergraduate course in language and linguistics at a public university in São Paulo to become Portuguese teachers. Carmen and Rafael team taught in the same school, whereas Giselle and Edna each selected a different school. In total practices in three different schools were investigated.

The study was exploratory-interpretive in nature (Grotjahn, 1987) and drew on verbal commentaries and reflective writing for data collection (Borg, 2006) which were an integral part of the PIBID programme, thus making an ecological use of pre-existing methods and naturally occurring data (Lewis & McNaughton Nicholls, 2014). The first method was an individual biographical interview using a self-reflection tool called 'Tree of Life' (Merryfield, 1993), which was aimed to record the participants' personal, educational and professional history and was conducted before they visited the schools where they would do their teaching practice. Prior to the interview, the student teachers were asked to draw a tree highlighting three main parts: the *roots*, where they reflected on their personal history (e.g. family values, early personal relationships and experiences, socio-cultural heritage); the *trunk*, where they described their pre-training educational history (e.g. primary and secondary schooling experiences) and; and the *limbs*, where they discussed significant or memorable adult experiences which may have promoted the development of new understandings of education (e.g. on Portuguese language teaching and learning). While chronologically recounting their biographies, the participants were invited to reflect on those factors which may have influenced their decisions to pursue a teaching career.

The second method was a photo-driven interview based on pictures which the participants had taken, during an initial two-week induction period, of aspects of their school contexts (e.g. facilities, resources, people, and practices) which had caught their attention. Their initial perceptions of these pedagogical contexts were examined as the participants described the photos and explained their rationales for taking them. The use of these visuals was helpful to support recall of concrete and situated memories, bridge psychological and physical realities, identify unpredictable issues,

and improve rigour through the use of multimodal techniques (Hurworth, Clark, Martin, & Thomsen, 2005; Rose, 2001). In order to help address the ethical, privacy and sampling issues involved in using photo-interviewing (Hurworth, 2003), the participants were granted consent by the institution to take pictures, agreed not to make them public and to use them only for the purposes of this study, and selected themselves the sample they would discuss in the interview.

Finally, an individual retrospective interview was conducted with each student teacher between three and four months after their teaching practices had started. These interviews were supported by copies of their teaching projects, lesson plans and reflective journals which they had written while observing classes from their allocated in-service school teachers and while designing and teaching their own lessons. These recall support documents constituted, too, part of the data set of the larger project. Although we had initially intended to conduct classroom observations and follow-up stimulated recall interviews, due to massive and extended student protests in São Paulo during the data collection period, we had to revisit our original methodological design and replace these methods with retrospective interviews. These practice-focused interviews provided insights into the pre-service teachers' pedagogical decisions, actions, rationales, perceived challenges and factors which they believed facilitated or inhibited their development of contextually appropriate pedagogies. It is the results from the analysis of photo-driven and retrospective interviews which are included in this paper.

All interviews were conducted in Portuguese, audio-recorded and then transcribed for analysis. The data were analysed inductively in relation to each participant adopting content analysis procedures (Boyatzis, 1998). Codes were first produced using key words, phrases and text chunks (codification). Themes were then identified (thematic analysis) and eventually grouped into categories (categorisation). For example, some of the emerging themes include school environment (physical and psychological), educational culture and practices, power relations, use of school facilities, access to pedagogical resources, teacher-student relations, learning environment, teaching-learning culture and practices, becoming a teacher and being a teacher. These were grouped into two overarching units of analysis: *critiques*, defined as perceptions that reveal attempts to problematise educational contexts, discourse and practices; and, *educational insights*, defined as perceptions that indicate understandings of educational contexts, discourse and practices generated during the participants' activities within the schools. The data were analysed by the researchers independently, and the emerging codes, themes and categories were then compared through a series of face-to-face and online



discussions. Data analysis was performed in the original language, Portuguese, to avoid the impact of translation-related issues. In addition, the study followed the ethical guidelines published by the British Educational Research Association, which involved obtaining voluntary informed consent from all participants, explaining their right to withdraw from the project at any time, and protecting their anonymity and the confidentiality of the data.

### **3. Findings**

The data provide evidence of a number of classroom episodes which, we believe, facilitated the development of contextually appropriate pedagogies and pedagogical knowledge. The perspectives of the pre-service teachers involved in these teaching incidents are analysed here, and, though these teachers were all engaged in team teaching (both planning and delivery) in their respective schools, two are presented as a team (Carmen and Rafael) and two individually (Giselle; Edna). As we do, the following conventions are used to identify the sources of the data we quote: (PDI) photo-driven interview and (IRI) individual retrospective interview. We are not seeking to characterise the experiences and perspectives of pre-service Portuguese language teachers who do their teaching practice in state schools located in peripheral areas of São Paulo - the insights provided here are based on the practicum experiences of four student teachers. The issues highlighted, though, might resonate with language (pre-/in-service) teachers working in similar institutions and circumstances, and are, we would argue, of broad relevance to language teachers and teacher educators.

#### *3.1 Carmen and Rafael*

Carmen and Rafael taught a group of 30 8<sup>th</sup> grade students (ages 12-13). These learners attended four one-hour classes of Portuguese per week and used textbooks in class which were provided by the government. The classroom was spacious but ill-equipped, consisting of a blackboard and individual tables and chairs. For their team teaching practice Carmen and Rafael developed a project on figures of speech which involved classroom tasks such as the analysis of language use in fictional texts and real life, class debates, and writing. The materials they adopted included the play *Auto da Compadecida*, by Ariano Suassuna, and videos of real-life events, which they watched in the school's video room.

#### *Being sensitive to the immediate social context*

Carmen and Rafael had selected a few literary texts which they would analyse with the students to enhance their understanding of figurative language:

[for] the first day ... we had prepared a text for shared reading, *Auto da Compadecida*, and we wanted to talk about figures of speech in the text, because this was the topic the teacher had been teaching (Carmen, IRI).

As they were reading it, however, they noticed that the students, who had been involved earlier that day in a student protest against the government's decision to close down some schools, including theirs, 'were very agitated, and they wouldn't manage to be completely focused on the reading' (Rafael, IRI). Carmen and Rafael thought that they could not overlook the students' emotional state and that, therefore, they had to modify their initial plans: 'We put ourselves in their shoes, thinking, 'is this reading, a literary passage, somehow distant from them? ... How is it going to help us achieve what we want? How can we contextualize it?' (Rafael, IRI). Concerned about being responsive to the students' immediate situation but also about meeting their teaching objectives for that class, they decided to integrate the topic of the current political context into the teaching of figures of speech:

We had a more general discussion on language use and what was going on in their school ... So understanding figures of speech, what is implicit in what we say ... all this was part of the discussion. We used the examples from the text ... but focused more on the information deriving from the political context they [the students] were living in (Rafael, IRI).

Carmen and Rafael thus analysed the classroom situation from the perspective of the learners and decided to contextualise the text analysis within a broad discussion of the existing social unrest which concerned the students, thus supporting them in establishing links between the text and the current social issues. They, Rafael argued, 'kept the original plans [teaching aims] for the class but used different resources [to achieve them]' (IRI).

However, not all the students were responsive to the suggested class discussion and there were some 'who were not willing to talk about what was going on' (Rafael, IRI) and, despite the student teachers' efforts, did not make any contributions:

When they were supposed to talk to us, they didn't want to participate; so we said, 'but you talk virtually every class, and today that you are being asked to talk to us you do not want to?' And they said, 'we are embarrassed, you will correct what we say'. And we told them, 'we won't correct, we want to talk'. But they were somehow blocked. (Carmen, IRI)

Carmen, like the students, attributed their fear of class participation to the persistent corrections of their class teacher. The participant illustrated this with an example

which raises an issue of linguistic identity, since the teacher's correction seems to be in conflict with the students' sociolect: 'Sometimes they say, "nóis vai" ["we goes"] and the teacher corrects, "a gente vai ou nós vamos" ["all of us go or we go"]; so they are blocked because the teacher insists on correcting the way they speak', IRI. This teaching practice reinforced, she believed, the social distance which students thought existed between themselves and teachers caused by perceived differences in academic background or social roles, particularly in the context of the classroom:

When we, who go to university ... are in class, they [the learners] get to some extent intimidated when we ask them to say something ... because when we are outside class, ... they always approach us and ask questions. But when we were in class [acting as teachers] they wouldn't talk to us. (Carmen, IRI)

Rafael, too, empathised with the learners and, recalling his own learning experiences, ascribed the fear of class participation to the potentially negative impact of expressing one's opinions:

When I put myself in their shoes, mainly when I was in high school or in the first or second year at university, I believe many times I had opinions to contribute but I didn't participate, maybe because I was afraid or scared of how other people would react. (Rafael, IRI)

These reflective comments provide evidence of the efforts which student teachers expend in order to make sense of classroom information and enhance their understanding of learners and teaching techniques, often supported by their own prior educational experiences as learners and their critical appraisals of the pedagogical practices and social interactions they observe during induction.

In response to the lack of participation of some students and in an attempt to engage the entire class, Carmen and Rafael suggested they should each 'write a letter to the state governor to explain why we want to keep our school open' (Carmen, IRI), to which all students responded positively:

They would come to us, ask questions, they would put their hands up to call us and we would go to their desks and help them, because they wanted to write everything correctly, they didn't want to make mistakes. They asked us how to write Alckmin [the name of the state governor] or other words they didn't know. And they participated; they wanted to write the letter ... There was purpose ... And they put a lot of effort into doing it. It was not simply another meaningless school task; it was not copying from the board or book. (Carmen, IRI)

Carmen and Rafael had finally managed to provide a task which, they believed, was meaningful to the students and helped to 'grasp their attention', 'keep [them] focused', and 'get them to be very quiet and write' (Carmen, IRI). Their attitude as

teachers and pedagogical approach thus seemed to address some of the critiques they had made of the classes they had observed during their induction: disengaged teachers ('She [the teacher] didn't want to be there and the students perceived that she didn't want to be there with them'; '[she] started to do her own paperwork ... let them do whatever they wanted'; Carmen, PDI); meaningless tasks ('the teacher always put on the board the [book's] page number for the theory and the exercises. So the students had to open the book, copy, do the exercises'; Rafael, PDI); class management techniques based on punishment ('It seems like a punishment ... "you don't keep quiet, so you'll have to copy this"'); Carmen PDI); limited teacher-student interaction ('she [the teacher] doesn't open possibilities for dialogue that are effective'; 'missing was a bit of interaction, dialogue'; Rafael, PDI); teaching methodology fully based on the textbook ('the way the teacher worked with the book ... it's as if the book were her teaching method. She somehow outsourced her teaching practices to the books'; Rafael, PDI); and lack of links to the immediate local context ('there was hardly any contextualization [of tasks or materials]'; Rafael, PDI).

#### *Appreciating in-class communities of practice*

During the induction period Carmen and Rafael noticed that 'the students did not sit in rows, like in a conventional classroom ... [but] in groups' (Carmen, PDI), These groups, Rafael believed, 'are spontaneous, of friends ... with bonds ... [who] create an identity together and, consequently, some dynamics for ... the organisation of the class' (PDI). They observed that imposing a more traditional seating arrangement was a time-consuming task with short-lived results:

The teacher would try to split these groups. Sometimes she would let them be, because she knew it was impossible to change them, to put everybody in rows, but most of the times she would waste time trying to reorganize the students just to ask them to copy from the board. (Carmen, PDI)

This, Carmen noted, impacted on the interaction between the teacher and the learners as the teacher 'spoke just to the students sitting in front ... [and] explained to those girls only' (PDI).

However, despite these initial appraisals, Carmen and Rafael attempted, without success, to reorganise the groups for one of their classes:

When they were asked to move and organize their chairs and tables, to split the groups, they got lazy. When we gave in and said, 'ok, so you stay where you are to do the activity', then they did it ... So they accepted to do the task when we did not meddle in the group formation. We had the group of boys who usually keep playing cell games in class; the big theatre group; the group of girls who like to

put on makeup; and the group of ... students who always tell jokes, always laugh. (Carmen, PDI)

Unlike the class teacher, though, they negotiated with the students and used the groupings already established in class, each constituting a small community of practice. Respecting this 'spontaneous' organisation of the classroom and the existing 'bonds' between the students, Carmen noted, had a positive impact on students' engagement and interaction:

I think they interacted more because they kept trying to figure out the answers, and we walked around the groups and observed when they didn't understand something and we tried to explain based on what they said. And they would then explain to the other group members using their own words, in their own way. (Carmen, IRI)

Carmen and Rafael eventually facilitated whole-class interaction by enabling students to work first within their own pre-established groups before they interacted with other groups and the class more generally. They also addressed the limited teacher-student interaction, noted above, and the lack of explanations which they had observed during induction ('the students were at a loss ... she [the teacher] got the grammar book, wrote something on the board, and they had to copy. There was no real explanation'; Carmen, PDI) by walking around the groups and providing explanations based on students' contributions.

### 3.2 Edna

Edna and her teaching partner taught 30 students in 1<sup>st</sup> year high school (ages 14-15). The learners attended four one-hour classes of Portuguese per week. The classroom consisted of a blackboard, a multimedia kit (computer, projector and sound equipment), chairs, tables, and books. For their team teaching practice Edna and her colleague devised a project on cultural aspects of urban life in Angola and the short story genre. The tasks which they adopted included in-class reading of short stories from *Os da minha rua*, by Ondjaki; open discussions based on the documentary *Oxalá cresçam pitangas*, by Ondjaki and Kiluanje; and individual writing of short stories, potentially to be displayed in school exhibits.

#### *Building explanations on students' understanding*

The project which Edna and her fellow trainee teacher planned for their practicum was aimed at teaching short stories as a genre. To do so, they designed a sequence of staged lessons which involved reading short stories, giving a presentation on the characteristics of the genre, and supporting students in writing a

short story. When they were presenting the genre, however, they noticed that some learners experienced difficulties in relating the concepts they had been explained to the short stories they had read:

First we read the stories, and after the reading we delivered a more standard lesson in which we introduced what a short story is. Then there was not much response from them, because we were saying, 'a short story is this, it has these elements'. Later we asked them why the stories we had read were considered short stories. And several students did not know how to answer, so we had to explain more. And this made us rethink what we were doing ... how could they write a short story if they couldn't understand what that was? (Edna, IRI)

Edna and her partner realised that teacher input did not necessarily enhance learners' understanding of notions. As a result, they decided to modify their approach by exploring the way in which the students conceptualised the genre ('So we decided to embark on their interpretation ... They understood that a short story is when you talk about something unexceptional, typical, in a different way', IRI) and by building on this to refine their explanations of short stories.

After the production stage, they found out that their new approach had been effective and resulted in students producing appropriate genres and elaborate pieces:

In the other class the other group of trainees ... explained the genre using a PowerPoint presentation we had prepared but they ignored how the students were interpreting the genre. It was more like an input session on theory. But when we read their students' productions, we saw that they were not short stories ... With our group we had emphasized this issue of expression, then students narrated stories of their childhood but they tried to find their own expression. When you compare, short stories written by students in our group are more elaborate in this sense, the themes are thicker. (Edna, IRI)

Edna and her partner thus developed a view of teaching as a process which involved the co-construction of meaning between the teacher and the learners: 'we realized ... that simply transmitting the content to students may lack substance. We need to draw on what they actually understand so that they can produce things based on their own understandings' (Edna, IRI).

### *Motivating students to write*

Based on their class observations, Edna and her partner anticipated that the students might not be self-motivated to write their short stories, particularly if these were assigned as a take-home task:

We expected that some students would refuse to write. So we decided that if they wrote in class, they would be more motivated [as] they would see the others writing. I believe this worked pretty well, mainly in the rewriting phase. Seeing the others writing motivated the reluctant students to write, and that's something they wouldn't do at home. We [the trainees] discussed a lot to make that decision. (Edna, IRI)

They believed that students' motivation may derive from being in an environment where others are already engaged. They therefore selected a context (the classroom) which would better support students in writing and editing their works.

Similarly, they resorted to technology to engage students in the process of revising and editing their works:

Instead of doing the rewriting phase in class, we went to the computer lab so that the students could use the word processor. Several students were excited about this ... there was a moment when we looked around and all the students were working, even the ones who hadn't written the story before ... So we thought that this rewriting process was really productive. (Edna, IRI)

Working on the computer, in turn, facilitated the process of providing individual feedback and supported students in the revision process:

We used Adobe to insert comments ... so the students got their feedback with these comments on the computer. A student said it was great because sometimes they couldn't understand what the teachers wrote in the margins ... In our case, we only indicated the aspects that required revision, and we explained that to them. Some students ... came to talk to us, so it was a process in which there was more dialogue, more negotiation. (Edna, IRI)

The use of technology to support the writing process thus promoted not only student motivation but also student agency and teacher-student interaction.

### *Responding to ethical dilemmas*

During her induction Edna had noticed that the students' productions were displayed on school walls, which she believed had a motivational value for students and promoted interaction among learners from different grades:

The school values and exhibits students' productions. All learners have their works published and access what different grades are doing. I find it really nice ... It is encouraging for the students to see their production in exhibits ... [Since] students do not interact much with other grades, the productions on the walls provide this interaction somehow ... So it is a form of indirect dialogue among students. (Edna, PDI)

Possibly motivated by this first good impression, Edna and her partner decided to compile all the short stories produced by the students in a book which could eventually be published. However, given that students had written 'about their own childhood memories' (Edna, IRI), Edna and her partner were soon confronted with an ethical dilemma:

Some stories were very deep; they had a huge impact on us ... Several students approached us to ask what we were going to do with their stories; they were concerned. We didn't know how to handle this. We were caught in a dilemma: to publish or not to publish. (Edna, IRI)

As a response to the learners' concerns, Edna and her partner consulted students 'whether they wanted their texts to be published or not' (Edna, IRI) and handed in a list to the teacher supervisor with the names of the students who had accepted for their stories to be made public. Thus, they not only responded to this issue ethically but also promoted student agency by encouraging students to formulate their individual choices. Unfortunately, however, the list was ignored:

The teacher-supervisor said that if the students had written at the school, then everything would be published anyway ... We gave her the list, but she refused to ask the students, so all the texts were published in the end. (Edna, IRI)

This suggested to them that disseminating students' work as part of a mandatory school policy may conflict with student agency and well-being.

### *3.3 Giselle*

Giselle and her teaching partner taught 30 7<sup>th</sup> grade students (ages 11-12) in a classroom which contained a blackboard, chairs, tables, and books. The learners attended four one-hour classes of Portuguese per week. For their team teaching practice Giselle and her colleague designed a project on narratives which consisted of a series of quick writing workshops aimed at training students to produce a story based on their own life experiences.

#### *Organising student participation*

One of the aspects which caught Giselle's attention during her induction school visits was the level of noise in classrooms and the difficulties which, she believed, class members experienced to communicate with one another:

... the noise in the classroom, that [class time] should be a time for reflection, for reading and listening to classmates or to the teacher... the students talk and the teacher has to shout. It is mutual shouting ... Sometimes the teacher says [to me], 'shout, really do if you want them to hear you', and I keep thinking, 'I don't



want to shout, I don't like to be shouted at'. I believe this is kind of a problem, the issue of listening. (Giselle, PDI)

As soon as Giselle and her fellow trainee teacher started their teaching practice, they were confronted with this issue, especially when they invited contributions from the students to a class discussion:

They do not put their hands up to speak or answer a question, they all talk simultaneously, and this explains why they talk without much reflection. They guess the words [answers] until they get them right. But they want to speak, they want to participate in these classes, but the participation lacked organization, structure. (Giselle, IRI)

They soon realised that willingness to participate was not an issue; managing class participation was, though. Classroom management then became a priority to them as they reviewed their lesson plans: 'Most of our students' energy derives from their willingness to participate ... but they found it hard to get organized. Maybe it is because of their age, but there is so much excitement that it becomes hard to deal with them' (Giselle, IRI).

One class Giselle and her partner organised a class discussion about the parts of a book. They had compiled the stories which the students had written into a book and wanted to invite students to choose the names of the chapters so as to 'establish a connection with their own writings' and 'develop a sense of ownership' (Giselle, IRI). The class task thus required that learners should communicate effectively and listen to each other's suggestions:

On this day we organized the room in a circle. With their tables and chairs we created a big circle ... They could look at one another, they had to talk to each other, give suggestions. It seems that they listen more to what others say when they can look at each other. I don't mean to say that they were super organized, they still talked all at the same time, they did not put their hands up to speak, but it was a bit more structured. (Giselle, IRI)

They adopted an atypical seating arrangement which would help them structure student-student interaction. This became one of several decisions they made to promote and socialise students into different and more effective forms of communication in the classroom.

### *Dealing with students' preconceptions about sensitive issues*

Giselle and her teaching partner conducted a class survey of students' interests in order to design the tasks and select the reading materials for the follow-up stage of their project. As they were eliciting different topics on 'what they [the learners] liked to

read, what they watched on TV [and] their favourite songs' (Giselle, IRI), they found themselves discussing sensitive issues which the students had raised and about which these made prejudiced comments:

... we ended up talking about controversial issues ... [such as] politics, racism, homophobia and chauvinism. Then we were confronted with a huge problem. A few students expressed their opinions in a very biased way, especially concerning non-Christian religions ... I had no clue as to how many things they reproduce without understanding them, for example when they called a friend 'macumbeiro' [someone who professes their faith through an Afro-Brazilian religion called Macumba] in order to offend ... We understood we couldn't ignore them, but we didn't know what to do about this. (Giselle, IRI)

The only relevant experience they had was based on their observations of how the class teacher had tackled similar situations with this group, but they did not believe this would have any pedagogical value:

We know that when the class teacher interferes ... she ends up simply telling them not to say these things, and this does not help the students reflect on why it is wrong to say what they are saying, why it is disrespectful. Only telling them to be quiet does not problematize [what they said], only silences the students.

(Giselle, IRI)

This classroom episode encouraged Giselle and her partner to 'reflect on the issue of how to promote critical thinking, how to teach them to think things through instead of simply reproducing this discourse they hear everywhere and that they do not even understand' (Giselle, IRI). Their class survey and subsequent discussion thus not only informed their next lessons in terms of the learners' interests in sensitive social issues and biases, but also made them aware of the need to develop pedagogies which promoted critical thinking rather than silenced students.

#### **4. Discussion**

The purpose of the study reported in this paper was to investigate how pre-service teachers develop ideas about contextually appropriate pedagogies during their practicum as well as what they see as the impact of their pedagogical practices on student learning. The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies within the constructivist paradigm (e.g. Cajkler & Wood, 2016; Cheng et al., 2012; Tang et al., 2012; Vujičić et al., 2015) in pointing out the important role of reflexivity in the development of pedagogical knowledge. However, the reflections here are not simply post-lesson, trainer-directed as in the studies by Vujičić et al. (2015) and Cajkler and Wood (2016); instead trainee reflections formed an integral part of their

involvement in the practicum and helped them develop a degree of autonomy. The findings presented here reveal that during their practicum experience the participants were able, through sustained critical reflection, to generate insightful critiques of their own and their teacher-supervisors' practices and, in doing so, developed educational insights about appropriate pedagogical practices in context. These educational insights drew on a number of sources within the contexts in which they practised as they tried to respond to student, institutional and local needs and realities. All four trainees worked in institutions and classrooms which presented different challenges to which they had to respond. For Carmen and Rafael, these challenges included dealing with students' emotional states and concerns as well as with student resistance to changing pre-established groups in the classroom. Edna and her teaching partner were faced with the challenge of helping students understand notions related to short stories, lack of student motivation to write as well as ethical issues with 'publishing' student writing. For Giselle and her partner, the challenge was how to make classroom participation more 'structured' as well as how to deal with students' prejudiced comments on sensitive topics and issues.

The process of responding to these contextual challenges was facilitated by conscious critical reflection-in-action (Mezirow, 1990) which led to the development of alternative actions to those of their teacher-supervisors. For example, Carmen and Rafael were able to integrate an issue of concern for the students into the teaching of figures of speech by abandoning the original text and contextualising text analysis within a broad discussion of a social issue about the potential closure of the school. Their decision to embed their teaching objectives in the real life experiences of students seems consistent with Kumaravadivelu's (2001, 2006) pedagogic parameters of *particularity* and *possibility* as both trainees drew from their awareness of the socio-political backgrounds, needs and consciousness of their students. In doing this, they seemed to have conceptualised teaching not as a mechanistic act but rather as part of the students' reality (Freire, 1970). What is more, both trainees were able to negotiate the terms of classroom discussion with students by not stifling their interaction through over-corrective feedback. Underlying this dialogue between teacher and students is the notion of what Freire (1970, p. 80) sees as the bidirectionality of education: 'The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself [sic] taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach'.

The interaction and dialogue with the students are thus essential in the development of appropriate pedagogies and the outcome for Carmen and Rafael is that they were both able to transform students' emotional energy into good

productive use by introducing a writing task (a letter to the governor) that was relevant to their immediate experiences. Edna and her partner realised that transmissive pedagogies might not be relevant to the learning needs of their students and thus engaged in an exploration of how learners conceptualise the short story genre being analysed and building on this to refine explanations. Also, drawing from their observations of students' lack of motivation to perform assigned tasks, both trainees decided to use the classroom as a motivational environment for productivity. In this way, their role was to provide explanations based on students' contributions, support students in the process of writing, and consult students regarding the dissemination of their stories. In a sense, their role shifted from knowledge providers to facilitators of learning as they created the psychological space for student autonomy and agency to emerge (Kuchah & Smith, 2011). In an effort to make classroom participation more organised and meaningful, Giselle and her partner realised that just shouting at students, like their teacher-supervisor had advised, would not help students learn; instead, they tried a seating arrangement which might help structure student-student interaction. Shamim (1996) argues that traditional classroom arrangements tend to exclude certain students from the 'action zone' and draws attention to the need for teachers to develop activities that permit all students to be visible, particularly in large classes. In the case of Giselle and her partner, the strategy for bringing all students into the 'action zone' was to organise the room into a circle so that students could see whom they were talking to and, as a result, develop more socially acceptable communication habits. Moreover, Giselle and her partner found that the teacher-supervisor's response to student prejudices was not helpful in developing their sense of criticality. Their critical reflection of the teacher-supervisor's response to student biases led them to the understanding that for education to be transformational, students need to be encouraged to problematize their own preconceptions rather than being silenced.

Overall, a number of factors, both internal and external to the pre-service teachers, appear to have facilitated their development of appropriate pedagogies. Key amongst these are their critical appraisals of their teacher-supervisors' and their own teaching supported by their pre-teaching observations and reflections during induction. In general the data show coherence between the student teachers' critiques and the pedagogies they developed. Critical appraisals, however, did not always automatically result in the development of alternative practices. For example, although Carmen and Rafael had critiqued their teacher-supervisor's failed attempts to reorganise students' in-class groups, they replicated this same behaviour without success. Yet, their recognition of the existing bonded units within the classroom

enabled them to negotiate productive ways of engaging with students in their groups and led to more interaction within and between groups. In addition to these external factors, trainees drew upon their own prior educational experiences (e.g. they were able to empathise with students because they had had similar experiences as learners), and their beliefs about learning (e.g. students' motivation, they believed, may derive from being in an environment where others were already engaged) as they developed their own knowledge about appropriate teaching. Freire (1994, p. 10) argues that human actions are often wrapped in 'manifold *whys*'; similarly, the factors which facilitate the development of appropriate pedagogies are multiple but this is only possible because trainees are constantly re-examining current ways of doing in the classroom. On the other hand, there are also a number of factors which might hinder the development of appropriate pedagogies. Trainees' own limited teaching experience and exposure to a variety of challenges (e.g. not knowing how to immediately respond when students made prejudiced comments) make it difficult to claim that their conceptions of appropriate pedagogy can be fully developed in a short practicum experience. Furthermore, students' prior learning experiences (e.g. being exposed to persistent corrections while speaking), their perceptions of social distance between themselves and the teachers, and their fear of the impact of expressing their opinions might constitute obstacles for trainee teachers' development of innovative pedagogical practices appropriate to the context.

Finally, a discussion of the processes through which trainees in this context develop ideas about appropriate pedagogical practices is relevant only if their ideas and practices have some form of impact on student learning. This paper shows that these trainees perceived a number of benefits of their thinking and actions on student learning experiences. Generally, trainees' actions in all three classrooms were perceived to have led to greater student motivation, more engagement and participation in classroom activities, and more focused and better student behaviour. In building classroom activities around the current socio-political realities of students, for example, Carmen's and Rafael's students were able to expend more effort on the writing task. Additionally, there was better in-group and between-group interaction and participation as a result of both trainees' understanding and acceptance of the group dynamics within the classroom. In adopting a social-constructivist approach to teaching and making the classroom the context for collaborative writing, Edna's students developed an enhanced understanding of literary genres, greater peer-regulated motivation and agency, and were consequently able to produce stories that she perceived to be thematically appropriate and richer than those written by the students of her peer trainees who had simply employed transmission models of

teaching. For Giselle and her partner, their realisation that student willingness to participate was not an issue led to their attempts to make their class less noisy by employing organisational techniques that resulted in more effective student participation, the socialisation of students into new forms of interaction, and their development of critical thinking.

The examples presented here showcase the transformational value of education when it is designed to develop dialogic and critical reflection. Appropriate pedagogy needs to be transformative for both students and student teachers. As shown above, trainees' learning processes were rewarding both for them and for their students; while students benefited from greater engagement, motivation and agency in their own learning, trainee teachers developed educational insights which helped them gain deeper understanding of the profession. Carmen and Rafael, for example, learned the value of drawing from students' lived experiences to generate learning and engagement in the classroom. Edna and her partner learned that teacher input did not necessarily enhance learners' understanding of notions, that teaching is a process which involves the co-construction of meaning between the teacher and the learners, and that disseminating students' work as part of a mandatory school policy may conflict with student agency and well-being. Giselle, in turn, found a need to develop pedagogies which promote critical thinking rather than silenced students.

## **5. Concluding comments**

In this paper we set out to report on part of a larger study which investigated the practicum pedagogical experiences and cognitive development of trainee teachers of Portuguese in state schools in the peripheries of São Paulo, Brazil. Our aim was to contribute to the current knowledge about teacher education by seeking to understand how pre-service teachers develop ideas about appropriate pedagogies as well as how their conceptualisations and enactments of appropriate pedagogies impact on student learning. The findings we have presented show that teacher education models which promote critical reflexivity and provide space for trainees to engage in a constructive dialogue both with their peers and with students are likely to generate innovative ideas for teaching which are appropriate to the specific contexts within which trainees teach. In this study trainee teachers' development of appropriate pedagogy was facilitated by an ongoing cycle of critical reflection and action which constituted an integral part of the practicum. This ongoing cycle drew from different sources of knowledge and helped them build educational insights from critiquing both their own practices and those of their mentors. In a sense, they were beginning to build a theory of teaching from their critical engagement with their

teaching contexts and the responses of their students to their own pedagogical practices. The student teachers in this study thus developed a conception of education as transformational and an awareness of the impact of their pedagogical choices on student learning.

The findings presented here, however, need to be taken with a bit of caution. While the practicum experience provides space for the development of innovative ideas and practices, it does not expose trainees to the institutional pressures which teachers face on a daily basis. It is therefore not clear whether these contextualised and critical reflection in action practices will carry through into powerful teaching practices later on when these trainees become autonomous practitioners in their own classrooms. While the experiences and practices reported here are an indication that there is value in designing teacher education programmes that promote teacher agency and give added impetus to critical reflection in practice, radical transformations cannot be claimed on the basis of a short practicum experience. There is a need for further research which examines whether and how reflective practices developed during the practicum are sustained and extended when trainees become professionals within different institutional contexts.

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